THE MYSTICAL STATE

ITS NATURE AND PHASES

AUGUSTE SAUDREAU

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By AUGUSTE SAUDREAU, *Hon. Canon of Angers*

Translated by D. M. B.

"Deus . . . det vobis spiritum sapientiae et revelationis in agnitione ejus."

"That God may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him."

EPHES. i 17.

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AUTHOR'S PREFACE

After being too long neglected and decried, mystical studies in our own day seem to be awakening a revival of interest. If there is nothing more interesting, nothing more encouraging than the spectacle of the operation of divine grace in souls, then the study of mystical graces, which of all other graces are those in which the hand of God is most plainly seen, must offer still greater encouragement and interest.

The reception afforded to our former works[1] has greatly encouraged us to publish the present volume. As in the preceding works, the reader will here find numerous extracts from the true doctors of mysticism, and, we think, a faithful summary of their teaching. This is the spring to which we must have recourse, from such wells alone must we draw if we wish our doctrine to be pure. In matters so sublime and so delicate, we run the risk of going astray if we seek for light from those who have no personal experience to guide them. Elsewhere we have shown how certain writers of the last centuries did not accurately reproduce the traditional mystical teaching. Yet only too frequently it is these second-hand writers who are taken as guides. In a remarkable work, full of theological science, which has recently[2] appeared, we read as follows: Mystical favours "are not comprised in the ordinary providence of God over his elect. There are ways and means of attaining, by the help of divine grace, to perfect self-abnegation; it would be an illusion to seek or desire those which lead to the mystical union of contem-

[1] *The Degrees of the Spiritual Life,* 2 vols., translated by Dom Bede Camm, O.S.B. (Burns Oates and Washbourne), and *La Vie d'Union à Dieu et les moyens d'y arriver.* [Other works by the same author have since appeared.—Translator's note.]

[2] 1903. The work alluded to is *De la grâce et de la gloire,* by Père Terrien, S.J., Vol. I, p. 264.

platives." The learned author has certainly no suspicion that these words are a condemnation of the great masters, who teach that we *ought* to tend towards the mystical and contemplative state, and who indicate the means by which we should dispose ourselves to receive it.

Quite recently, in one of our most esteemed reviews (January 5, 1903), another writer, also a man of learning and talent, made an assertion denoting the same opinions with regard to contemplative states. Taking exception to the statements of the eminent author of a *Life of St Teresa*,[1] who had blamed several of the directors of the Saint for seeking to turn her aside from mystic ways, while St Francis Borgia, on the contrary, had encouraged her to persevere in them, the writer to whom we allude affirms that such direction could have no harmful consequences, for, he says, speaking of contemplation, "no one can put obstacles in the way when it pleases God to bestow it." Elsewhere we have related the indignant complaints of the Saints against spiritual directors who give such advice; for example, St John of the Cross, St Jane de Chantal, Père Alvarez, and St Teresa herself; complaints which give the most formal denial to this assertion.

How is it possible that in so important a matter grave and experienced men have reached conclusions so opposite? On both sides appeal is made to experience; often have we heard this same argument made use of by both parties with equal sincerity. We have heard a number of priests, men of solid virtue and deep experience, affirm that the mystical state is frequently met with, that it is a state ordinarily attained by souls fully faithful to grace; we have also heard others equally deserving of credit declare that this state is extremely rare, and that the greater number of perfect souls are never raised to it.

Evidently these men do not agree in their conception of what the mystical state is; some recognise its presence where others deny it altogether.

[1] *Ste Thérèse,* par Henri Joly. (Collection *Les Saints.* Paris, Lecoffre; English trans., London, Burns Oates and Washbourne.)

In solving this difficulty the first question to be answered is: What is the nature of the mystical state? Upon the response we make to this question depend many theoretical principles as well as *many practical rules of great importance.*

Some consider the mystical state as the outcome of graces which are supplementary, accessory, such as the gift of miracles or prophecy, visions, revelations, additional graces which may or may not be bestowed above and beyond those which are necessary to perfection. According to this theory it will come about that many souls will love God with an heroic love without having received any grace of contemplation. They add that contemplative graces are irresistible, extraordinary, and since it is presumption to desire extraordinary graces, it is better and more in accordance with humility not to aspire to mystical graces.

Others,[1] on the contrary, hold that mystical graces are those eminent graces which are granted by God to faithful and generous Christians for their perfection and sanctification.

If we have known how to dispose ourselves thereto, and have been faithful in doing so (for it is quite within our power to refuse our co-operation), these graces will illuminate our soul with clear light and obtain for it perfect love. Thus illuminated and filled with love, the faithful soul finds it easy and delightful to contemplate the divine perfections and unite herself to her God. Those who hold this doctrine say, with St Francis de Sales, "Contemplation is the child of love . . . love being obtained makes us contemplate, for love," when it has reached its full development, "shows us so desirable a sweetness in the beloved object that our minds will never grow weary of seeing and considering it." It is in no wise contrary to humility to desire perfect knowledge and perfect love of God: therefore there is nothing more praiseworthy than to desire these mystical graces, this "holy contemplation" which

[1] Certain authors have indeed endeavoured to reconcile these two schools of thought; it does not seem to us that they have succeeded in interweaving doctrines so fundamentally opposed.

is the normal term of the spiritual life, "*the end and the goal to which all its exercises tend,*"[1] reading, prayer and meditation.

It is to this second opinion that we adhere; we hope to prove it to be the true one. We do not ask anyone to accept our assertions blindly; on the contrary, we beg our readers to go to the fountain head, themselves to study the writings of those who, in this matter, should be our guides and law-givers. If any are brought, by perusing the present work, to read for themselves the writings of the great mystics, if they find therein a lucid explanation which will make such reading easy and mystical doctrine a delight, our end will have been attained and our satisfaction complete.

Since the publication of the first edition of *L'État Mystique* (April, 1903), mystical questions have continued to rouse great interest among Catholic writers. But agreement has not yet been reached on the fundamental principles of this science, at once so important and so practical. It is true that, thanks to a deeper study of the great masters, the true doctrine gains ground steadily. Those who claim that mystical graces are a kind of extrinsic growth, not necessary to sanctification and entirely extraordinary in character, necessitating an exceptional and very rare vocation, are every year less numerous. Some remarkable books, *manifestly written by men of experience,* and whose teaching is drawn from the true sources, have largely contributed towards bringing men back to the traditional doctrine. Let us mention, among others, *La science de la prière,* by Père Louis de Besse (out of print); *Les voies de l'oraison mentale,* by Dom Vital Lehodey, abbot of La Trappe de Bricquebec; *La contemplation,*[2] manual of mystical theology by Père Lamballe;[3] the brochure of Père Jean de la Croix, *Ascétique et Mystique,* and many others.

[1] St Francis de Sales, *Love of God,* Bk. VI, ch. iii and iv.

[2] English trans., *Mystical Contemplation,* London, Burns Oates and Washbourne.

[3] Père Lamballe (Eudist) having died a holy death March 3, 1914, we may now say that in treating of these questions he spoke from

The history of spirituality in France during these last centuries, related with both talent and learning by the Abbé Bremond, has rendered great service in clearly showing what were the well-authorised tenets of ancient mysticism, and how a change of doctrine, regrettable from every point of view, has come about. Lastly, it is of great importance that chairs of spirituality have been erected at Rome, which have given great impetus to mystical studies; reviews have also been started to treat of these matters, amongst which one, *La Vie Spirituelle*, has taken up a well-defined position, and has published many excellent articles, in which the traditional doctrine is clearly expressed and strongly defended.

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experience, for he was himself far advanced in mystic ways. By this very fact, his authority far outweighs that, for example, of Ribet († 1909), who himself declared that he had no experience of the states he was describing. We are glad of the opportunity of quoting here a passage from the first letter we received from Père Lamballe: "First of all I must tell you that I am not, properly speaking, your disciple. It is only lately that I have read your books, after many other older manuals, and after St Teresa, St John of the Cross, and dear St Francis de Sales. My opinions were then practically formed. Still, your works gave me great pleasure; I was so glad to see realised an undertaking the great need of which I had long felt. I must also tell you that I began by reading the well-known books of Père Poulain, whose doctrine, in my opinion very erroneous and incoherent, had completely befogged me. The clouds were dispersed by St Teresa, aided by St John of the Cross and St Francis de Sales." Thus it is because we have drawn from the same sources that he and I hold the same doctrine. Père Louis de Besse († 1910) was also a contemplative, and the same may be said of Père Jean de la Croix (died at Angers in 1919).

TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

To the second French edition of the *Mystical State* the author of that work united another entitled *Les Faits Extraordinaires*. The present translation, however, is taken only from that portion contained in the first edition. Chapter X, which was transferred by the author to an appendix in the second edition, has been retained by us in its original position; but we have added Chapter XV from the second edition to our translation, as also Appendices I and II. In a work such as this, certain expressions must necessarily be technical, and some sentences may appear obscure, but we have striven throughout to combine strict accuracy with clearness of meaning.

D. M. B.

PROTESTATION

In obedience to the decrees of Urban VIII, of March 15, 1625, and of July 5, 1634, we declare that when giving the title of Saint or Blessed to any persons of high virtue mentioned in this book, or when speaking of miraculous and extraordinary deeds or events, we only do so in accordance with the usage of ordinary language, without meaning in any way to anticipate the judgements of Holy Church. We also protest that we submit the whole of this work without any restriction whatsoever, in a spirit of most respectful and filial obedience, to the opinion of the Holy See.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

SOME EXAMPLES OF THE MYSTICAL STATE

PAGE

1. Descriptions of it are very rare—St Margaret Mary—Ven. Mary of the Incarnation - - - - - - - - 1
2. The Peasant of Ars—The Ven. Mother Mary Pelletier—St Jane Frances de Chantal - - - - - - - 3
3. Are these examples well-chosen and sufficient? - - - - 5

CHAPTER II

ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE WORD "MYSTICAL"

1. Doctrine of Denis the Mystic—The three ways of knowing God—Mystical knowledge - - - - - - 8
2. Mystical knowledge is a gift which God desires to give, and for which we ought to prepare ourselves - - - - - 10
3. Signification of the word "mystical" - - - - - 13

CHAPTER III

TEACHING OF THE FATHERS CONCERNING THE MYSTICAL STATE

1. Clement of Alexandria—Hesychius - - - - - 15
2. St Basil—St Gregory of Nyssa—St Maximus - - - - 17
3. St Augustine—St Gregory the Great - - - - - 19

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTICAL STATE ACCORDING TO THE DOCTORS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

1. St Bernard - - - - - - - - - 22
2. St Thomas - - - - - - - - - 23
3. St Bonaventure - - - - - - - - - 28

CHAPTER V

TEACHING OF ST TERESA ON THE MYSTICAL STATE

PAGE

1. Distinction made by St Teresa between states of prayer which can be acquired and those which are infused - - - 33
2. Ecstatic states - - - - - - - 35
3. States of prayer which are purely mystical - - - 41
4. The distinctive elements of mystical prayer: I. Peace and profound satisfaction; II. Sensible delights; III. Ardent love; IV. Lights - - - - - - - - 43

CHAPTER VI

THE NATURE OF THE MYSTICAL STATE ACCORDING TO ST JOHN OF THE CROSS

1. Clearness of his doctrine - - - - - - 47
2. The loving knowledge of God, an eminent knowledge, received not acquired, is the foundation of the mystical State - - 47
3. Mystical theology - - - - - - - 52
4. Part played by the soul in mystical contemplation - - 54
5. Mystical union is the perfect exercise of faith, hope and charity - - - - - - - - 57
6. The transformation of the soul into God is the work of mystical union - - - - - - - - 58
7. The mystical state is an eminent grace, but not an extraordinary favour - - - - - - - - 60

CHAPTER VII

THE NATURE OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE STATE ACCORDING TO SUAREZ - - - - - 62

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION: MYSTICAL UNION, HOW IS IT TO BE RECOGNISED? - - - - - - - 65

CHAPTER IX

THE ELEMENTS WHICH ALONE CONSTITUTE THE MYSTICAL STATE

1. The elements indicated are sufficient to constitute the mystical state - - - - - - - - - 72
2. Elements added by some authors: ligature, consciousness of the state of grace - - - - - - - 73
3. Joy and consolations are not essential to the mystic state - 75
4. The sentiment of the presence of God is not essential to the mystical state - - - - - 76

CHAPTER X

THE MYSTICAL REALISATION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

PAGE
1. Nature of the realisation of the divine presence - - - 83
2. The consciousness of the presence of God according to the Saints—St Francis de Sales - - - - - 85
3. St Teresa's doctrine - - - - - - 86
4. Doctrine of St Bernard, St Bonaventure, St Thomas, Surin, Grou, etc. - - - - - - - - 92
5. Conclusion - - - - - - - - 95

CHAPTER XI

THE PHASES OF THE MYSTICAL STATE

1. It is impossible to measure the intensity of mystical graces - 97
2. Mystical aridity or arid contemplation - - - - 100
3. The mystical state when sensible and sweet - - - 102
4. The mystical state fully developed - - - - 104
5. The three phases of the mystical state according to the Ven. Mary of the Incarnation - - - - - 107

CHAPTER XII

ORIGIN OF THE DIVISION OF CONTEMPLATION INTO MYSTICAL CONTEMPLATION AND ACQUIRED OR NON-MYSTICAL CONTEMPLATION

1. The Masters know only mystical contemplation - - 110
2. Doctrine of St Francis de Sales, St Teresa, and St John of the Cross 111
3. The contemplation of pagans and the learned — Doctrine of Albert the Great and Walter Hilton - - - - - 115
4. Inexactitude of certain authors: Joseph of Jesus and Mary, Thomas of Jesus, Philip of the Holy Trinity, Honorius of St Mary, Lopez Ezquerra — More exact doctrine of Fathers Calatayud, Michel de la Fuente - - - - 117
5. Exact doctrine but inaccurate terms of certain more experienced authors: Boudon, Père de Clorivière - - - 124
6. The prayer of simplicity described by Bossuet is a mystical prayer - - - - - - - - - 127

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNITIVE WAY

1. The words mystical way, contemplative way, unitive way, perfect way, designate the same state - - - - 130
2. Testimony of St John of the Cross, Suarez, John of Jesus and Mary, Bona, etc. - - - - - - - 134
3. Novel conception of the mystical state and duplication of the unitive way - - - - - - - - 138

CHAPTER XIV

DESCRIPTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MYSTICAL STATE

PAGE

1. The entrance into the mystical state - - - - - 142
2. Action of God on the higher portions of the understanding and will - - - - - - - - - 144
3. The part played by the inferior portion during mystical operations - - - - - - - - - 145
4. Part played by the intermediate powers - - - - 147
5. More active co-operation with mystical graces - - - 150
6. How the superior powers are emancipated from the inferior faculties - - - - - - - - 153
7. Incompatibility of the mystical state with hysteria - 154

CHAPTER XV

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL STATES

1. Reasons for this study—resemblances between the two state - 157
2. Ascetical lights and mystical lights - - - - - 159
3. Ascetical love and mystical love - - - - - 162
4. Mystical feelings: Peace, sweetness, desire, pain - - 165
5. The mystical trial of impotence, and the temptations of the mystical state - - - - - - - - 170
6. The influence of mystical gifts on the conduct o our ife - - 173
7. The passions in the mystical state - - - - 175

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I

THE WIDELY DIFFERENT AND ILL-FOUNDED MOTIVES WHICH ARE BROUGHT FORWARD TO DISTINGUISH ACQUIRED OR ACTIVE CONTEMPLATION FROM THAT WHICH IS PASSIVE OR INFUSED 179

APPENDIX II

DOES CONTEMPLATION NECESSITATE A SPECIAL AND VERY RARE VOCATION? - - . - 199

The teaching of Père de Maumigny - - - -

Index - - - - - - - - - 202

THE MYSTICAL STATE
ITS NATURE AND PHASES

CHAPTER I

SOME EXAMPLES OF THE MYSTICAL STATE

1. *Descriptions of it are very rare—St Margaret Mary—Ven. Mary of the Incarnation.*

Before explaining in what the mystical state consists, it may be useful, we think, to illustrate it by some examples from the lives of the Saints, which will make the psychological explanations which follow easier of comprehension. Unfortunately, descriptions are not easily found, especially if taken, as we think it best to do, from among facts historically known and accepted. The mystical state is of frequent occurrence, but descriptions of it are only too rare. Persons who are in this state, as St John of the Cross tells us, "experience a great repugnance to speaking of it, and do not know in what terms to do so. They confine themselves to affirming that their heart is tranquil and satisfied, that they feel the presence of God, and that all seems to be well" (*Night*, Book II, 17).

2. Some interesting accounts are, however, to be found in the writings of the Saints. For instance, St Margaret Mary writes thus: "I should have considered myself the happiest being in the world if I could have passed whole nights before the Blessed Sacrament, for there I felt such an assurance of well-being, that, although up to that moment I might have been extremely happy, all remembrance of previous

pleasure was forgotten once I was in this place of delights. On the eves of my communions I felt myself plunged in so profound a silence by the consideration of the greatness of the action I was about to perform, that I could not bring myself to speak without using considerable constraint. After I had communicated, I should have wished neither to drink nor to eat, to see nor to speak, so great were the peace and consolation I experienced. I sought retirement as much as I could, that therein I might learn to love my Sovereign Good, who urged me so strongly to return him love for love" (*Autobiography*).

"Often it seemed to me that I was losing the time spent in prayer, because I found myself utterly unable to apply my thoughts to the subject I had proposed, my heart seeming as if lost in the presence of God, without any other movement or affection than that of loving, with a great desire to suffer something for his love. At such times I was wont to make my prayer of some two or three words such as these: 'No, my God, I will never resist thee!' or thus: 'It is enough for me, my Beloved, to be as thou desirest.' Another time I said: 'How beautiful he is, the Beloved of my soul! Why cannot I love him perfectly?'" (*ibid.*).

"Sometimes I prayed to my good angel to awaken me. I felt my heart entirely filled with God, whose conversation was so sweet that often I passed three hours without other sentiments or movements than those of love, without being able to fall asleep again" (*ibid.*).

3. The Ven. Mother Mary of the Incarnation, foundress of the Ursulines of Quebec, "who is called," said Bossuet (*Instr. sur les États d'or.*, l. ii), "the Teresa of our days, and of the New World," has related in what her prayer consisted, while she was still in the world:

"As soon as I placed myself on my knees before my crucifix, my whole heart was transported, and I could only say to my sweet Saviour over and over again: 'It is love which has reduced thee to this state. If thou wert not love thou wouldst not have suffered

thus.' This impression was always so strong that I could but repeat again and again the same words: 'No, if thou wert not love, thou wouldst not have done such great things for love of me.' I then experienced such a strange throbbing in my breast that often I nearly fainted. I desired unceasingly to possess the spirit of Jesus. Nothing seemed to me so beautiful, so good, so desirable as this spirit of love. I pursued it, crying with the spouse in the Canticles: 'Draw me after thee. We will run after thee in the odour of thy perfumes.'"

"My soul," she says again, "never ceased to be continually drawn towards God in a manner wholly spiritual. I was tormented by the desire to possess him after a fashion wholly new, of which I was as yet ignorant, and which I could not define. I saw him in all his creatures, and understood for what ends they had been created. This knowledge was so entirely spiritual, being in my spirit like a ray of contemplation entirely purified from all things material, that these objects caused me no distractions. . . . I spoke also to the Supreme Majesty of God, and addressed to him these words of the Holy Scriptures: 'Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive all glory and all honour, for thou hast created all things, and it is by thy will that all things subsist.' Then my soul melted into acts of thanksgiving, and although I appeared to myself to be utterly vile and base in the eyes of God, yet I felt drawn towards him by I know not what powerful attraction" (*Life* by Abbé Chapot, Pt. I, ch. iv).

"In the streets," she says elsewhere, "in prayer, in whatever place I might be, I languished with love. I do not know how to describe what takes place when the soul is in this state: it suffers, it languishes, it enjoys" (*ibid.*, ch. viii).

2. *The Peasant of Ars—The Ven. Mother Mary Pelletier—St Jane Frances de Chantal.*

4. Everyone will remember the story of the good old peasant whom the Curé d'Ars used to see passing

long hours of adoration in the church day by day. Astonished at seeing him remain silent, without even moving his lips, the holy curé asked him one day what he used to say to our Lord during those long hours of adoration: "Oh! I do not say anything," answered the old man; "I look at him and he looks at me."

5. Those sisters who knew personally the Ven. Mother Mary of St Euphrasia Pelletier tell us that whilst she was at prayer she resembled a seraph; her eyes were lit up and fixed on the tabernacle, her attitude, her whole exterior comportment showed unmistakably how ardent was her prayer, how close her union with God. In the choir her recollection was so profound that when it was necessary to arouse her, it was often not sufficient to call her gently, but they were obliged to pull her habit in order to attract her attention. She readily found repose in the consideration of the sublimest mysteries of the Faith, and used to tell her daughters that the mystery of the Blessed Trinity would often suffice to occupy her mind in prayer for a whole week.

6. St Jane Frances de Chantal, says Mother de Chaugy (*Life* of the Saint, ch. xxiv), remained for seven years in the ordinary way of consideration and meditation; but after these seven years of faithful and laborious service, her heart was espoused to the beautiful Rachel of contemplation." It was then, when she had already been long in the contemplative state, that in 1621 (June 29), in a well-known letter to St Francis de Sales, she wrote the following description of what passed within her. "My dearest Father," she says, "I feel no longer that abandonment and that sweet confidence, and I know not how to make any acts of these virtues, yet it seems to me that I possess them more solidly and firmly than before. My soul, in its highest point, is in a very simple unity (that is, union with God). This union is not effected by its own working, for when it wishes to make acts of union, which it only too often desires to do, it feels that it makes the efforts, yet sees clearly that it cannot effect its purpose, but only remains united. My soul does

not wish to relinquish this state; it does not reflect on it. All it does is to form interiorly an almost imperceptible desire that God will do with it and with all creatures just as he pleases. It desires no other exercise than this for its morning prayer, for holy Mass, for preparation for holy Communion, as a thanksgiving for all God's benefits; in a word, for everything. My soul desires only to remain in this most simple unity of spirit with God, without looking elsewhere, and in it (that is, in this very simple union with God) to say sometimes the *Pater* for the whole world, for particular persons and for herself, yet without diverting her gaze, or regarding for what nor for whom she is praying. Often, according to the occasion, and to the necessity or affection which comes unsought, the soul flows out in this unity."

At another time she proposes to the holy Bishop the following question: "Would it not be well, especially in time of prayer, that my soul should try to arrest all kinds of discourse, industry, curiosity, and such like, and instead of regarding what she is doing, what she has done, or is going to do, look simply at God, and thus simplify her spirit and empty it of all care as regards herself, remaining in this simple view of God and of her own nothing, entirely abandoned to the will of God, so that thus she may hold herself contented and tranquil, without disturbing herself to make acts of the understanding and of the will?"

It is impossible not to associate these words of St Jane Chantal with those of the famous passage in which the author of the works attributed to St Denis bids his disciple to exercise himself in mystical contemplation, renouncing all reasoning, all that is sensible or intelligible, to unite himself to him who is above all substance and all science.

3. *Are these examples well chosen and sufficient?*

7. These are well-authenticated examples of mystical states. But what is the mystical state? What is mystical prayer? Mystical prayer is very superior to

meditation.[1] The latter resembles a careful study, accompanied by petitions and resolutions; we can give ourselves up to it as we might to serious reflection; it is not above our own efforts, for God does not refuse his grace to anyone who wishes to apply himself to it. We cannot enter in the same way into mystical prayer; whatever efforts we may make, we shall never attain to it unless we are raised by the divine favour to so meritorious a state. This much is admitted by all.[2]

Have we not, then, in all the examples we have quoted, a mode of prayer greatly superior to meditation, a method of prayer which cannot be proposed to everyone, for vain would be the efforts of those who would endeavour to raise themselves to it by their own strength? To a soul who desires to give herself to prayer, one can give a method such as that of the *Introduction to a Devout Life;* or that of which St Ignatius gives examples in his *Exercises*. Every earnest Christian can apply himself to such, and succeed in it, at least in a certain measure. One would not, however, say to any Christian, however earnest, who showed a desire to apply himself to works of piety: "Act in such a way that all your faculties, like those of St Margaret Mary, become swallowed up in God, without other movements and affections than those of loving him; remain before the tabernacle, like the peasant of Ars, for whole hours, saying nothing, without great thoughts, happy only in finding yourself close to our Lord, looking at him and being looked at by him. Try, like St Jane Chantal, to arrest during your prayer every kind of reasoning; look at God, simplify

[1] We do not here distinguish affective prayer from meditation; they only differ in that in meditation the part played by the understanding is greater, and reflections predominate. In affective prayer, desires, petitions, and acts of the will hold the chief place.

In the case of persons to whom God has given this grace and who have corresponded with it, the mystical state may become habitual, and they will find themselves in it as soon as they begin to pray (St John of the Cross, *Montée,* II, 12, edicion critica, p. 154). This was the case with those holy souls of whom we have just spoken. It is not the same with certain states such as prophecy, or vision, into which no one can enter at will, and which are totally different from the mystical state, properly so called.

your mind, empty it of everything, and remain in this simple view of God and of your own nothingness, entirely abandoned to his will." These would be counsels impossible to follow; the states at which these holy persons arrived are manifestly above the efforts of the human soul.

8. But do the examples quoted represent all the mystical states?

We have designedly excluded from these examples all ecstatic states. The mystical state does not exclude ecstasy, but the latter includes something more than the mystical state; it comprises a new element, alienation of the senses, which is added to the mystical graces, and may exist without them. Is it not then better, in order to understand the nature of the mystical state, to study it in its essential elements, setting aside secondary and accidental phenomena? These latter might take upon themselves the appearance of being the real thing, and hinder an exact analysis of phenomena truly mystical.

9. The examples we have given present mystical states sufficiently elevated; if they had not also been striking we should not have chosen them. But the mystical state also exists, and even more frequently, in a lesser degree. *Nemo repente fit summus*, one does not attain the summit at the first attempt. Before arriving at states of prayer so perfect, and in which the presence of mystical elements is so manifest, mystical graces are received in smaller measure, and they are then more difficult to discern.

As for prophecy, visions and revelations, these are extraordinary phenomena, but essentially different from the mystical state, properly so called. We will speak of them later. Those persons are greatly in error who place in the same class states so different, and who apply to them the same rules.

CHAPTER II

ORIGIN AND SIGNIFICATION OF THE WORD "MYSTICAL"

1. *Doctrine of Denis the Mystic—The three ways of knowing God—Mystical knowledge.*

10. The word *mystical* is found in the works attributed to St Denis. It is important to understand the meaning which this word has for the author of these books. No one is ignorant of the influence he exercises in the Church, and how all the spiritual teaching of the Middle Ages is impregnated with his doctrine.

Denis desires to show how the perfect knowledge of God may be reached.

11. In the first place, by symbols: God is represented under sensible images. These symbols, the author tells us, he has explained in a work entitled *Symbolic Theology*, a work which has disappeared. This use of symbols is made when it is said of God that he inhabits places, he is clothed with ornaments, when anger, sorrow, sleep, awakening, etc., are attributed to him. It is evident that these symbols give a very incomplete idea of God.

12. The second means, somewhat more perfect, consists in studying the names given to God, and which belong to him in strict truth. The author employed this means in his *Hypotyposes* or *Theological Institutions*, also lost to us. In it he treated of the divine unity, of the Trinity, of the paternity and filiation, of the Holy Spirit, and the Incarnation. In the *Divine Names* he explains why God is called good, why he is called life, wisdom, strength.

13. This again is not the most perfect means of acquiring a just idea of God; there is a higher knowledge, of which Denis often speaks. It is "that perfect knowledge of God, which is obtained by ignorance in virtue of an incomprehensible union"; this takes

place when the soul, "*leaving everything*, and, *forgetting herself, is united to the splendour of divine glory*, and is illuminated among these splendid abysses of unfathomable wisdom" (*Divine Names*, VII, 3).

This science is greatly superior to that which we can obtain by the light of our own reason. By our reason, indeed, "we only know the divine by its effects; but to say what it is in itself, this it is that surpasses all understanding. When we call this mysterious ocean of being God, life, substance, light, or word, we are conceiving nothing else than the graces which come to us from it, by which deification, existence, life or wisdom are imparted to us. But as regards itself, we only attain to it by the complete repose of the faculties of the understanding, no longer perceiving anything; neither deification nor life nor substance that could bear an exact comparison with that first cause, supereminently raised above all things."

It is not, then, by reasoning that we can attain to this sublime idea of God, which is the most perfect knowledge that we can have of him; neither is it, as certain twentieth century authors have maintained, by seeing him; it is, on the contrary, by not seeing him. "We desire," says Denis, "to enter into this superluminous obscurity and to see and to know *by the very fact that we do not see and do not know* him, who is above all sight and all knowledge (Δι' αβλεψιας και ἀγνωσίας ἰδειν και γνωναι το ὑπερ θεαν καὶ γνωσιν). For it is truly to see and to know, it is supersubstantially to praise the supersubstantial, to declare that he is nothing of what other beings are" (*Theol. Myst.*, II).

Thus the soul united to God in a union of love receives a light which makes it understand that God is the incomprehensible, ineffable Being, and this is the true knowledge of God.

This science, which is then obtained neither by reasoning nor by a view of God, but by a union with God full of love and very intimate, Denis calls *Mystical Theology*. He says again: "Theologians have a twofold doctrine, one inexpressible, the other evident and more accessible, one which under

symbols hides mysteries, the other philosophic and demonstrative. But the mysterious and inexpressible science is found wrapped up in the expressed symbol. The symbol sets forth and inculcates the truth in question, the mystical, the inexpressible springs towards God, and unites to him by a sort of initiation which no master could teach" (*Ep.*, IX, 1).

It is in the highest part of the soul that the mystical operation takes place. "To that portion of the soul which is beyond the reach of the passions must be assigned the contemplation of pure and profound truths" (*ibid.*).

2. *Mystical knowledge is a gift which God desires to give, and for which we ought to prepare ourselves.*

14. God delights in giving this mystical knowledge. "The sweet and blissful nature of God pours down from the bosom of his constant immutability the salutary rays of his light into our understanding; . . . and this light he is always ready to communicate abundantly" (*Hier. Eccl.*, II, 3).

"The supreme being drives out ignorance and error from every soul in which he reigns; he bestows upon them all a holy light. . . . First he gives them a little brightness, then, when having tasted the light they desire to receive more, he distributes it to them in greater abundance. *Because they have loved much he inundates them with this light, and ever he urges them forward in proportion to the zeal they have shown in raising their glance on high*" (*Divine Names*, IV, 5).

This precious light is given, then, as Denis says again, to souls who are well disposed, to souls eager for perfection, full at once of humility and of a noble and confident ardour (*Divine Names*, I, 2). To souls less advanced is proper the use of symbols, which hide the inexpressible knowledge to which all cannot attain. "The veil is only raised for those sincere lovers of sanctity who by their purity of spirit and the powerfulness of their contemplative faculty are fitted for pene-

trating the true in its intimate simplicity and supernatural profundity" (*Ep.*, IX, 1).

This mystical knowledge is communicated by God. It is he himself, says Denis, himself, perfect peace, creative peace, who, without leaving himself, pours himself out upon all creatures. He seizes the soul, he tranquillises it, and unites it to himself by an ineffable union. "Through God," he says again, "through God, who is substantial peace, souls draw together their multiple reasonings, and reducing them to the unity of a pure conception, are raised in a manner proper to themselves, to a union which is above all comprehension" (*Divine Names*, XI, 1, 2).

15. But the part played by the soul does not consist only in receiving the divine favour; she ought to dispose herself for it. This is done by prayer: "Above all things, let prayer conduct us towards the principle of all good, that in approaching him[1] we may be initiated into the holy gifts which surround him. . . . In truth, he is always present to all, but all things are not always present to him. When we address to him our loving supplications, with a mind free from all anxiety and a disposition of soul favourable to divine union, then we become present to him. It is by prayer, then, that man is raised to the sublime contemplation of the splendours of the divine goodness" (*Divine Names*, III, 1).

Another means of disposing the soul for this divine gift is by "generous and frequent elevations towards the one God, by the mortification and annihilation of all that is contrary to him" (*H. E.*, II, 5). Or again, "by arresting all operation of the understanding to throw oneself, as much as possible, into the supersubstantial splendour" (that is, into God) (*Divine Names*, I, 4)—"The soul is raised to mystical truths, as holy tradition teaches, by a superintellectual elevation" (*ibid.*, II, 7).

This is the doctrine taught by Denis, and summed up in the famous text in which he points out to his disciple how he ought "to exercise himself in mystical

[1] *Accedite ad eum et illuminamini* (Ps. xxxiii 6).

contemplation." This text has been commented upon by many great doctors, who have regarded it, with good reason, as of capital importance, as one of the fundamental points of mystical doctrine:

"As to thyself, O beloved Timothy, exercise thyself untiringly in mystical contemplation. Set aside the senses and the operations of the understanding, all that is material and intellectual, all things that are, and those that are not, and by a supernatural flight, unite thyself as intimately as possible to him who is above all essence and all notion. For it is by this sincere, spontaneous, and total abandonment of thyself that, free and unfettered, thou shalt precipitate thyself into the mysterious splendour of the divine obscurity" (*Theol. Myst.*, I, 1).

Lay aside, then, all reflection, forget all that is created, forget thine own self, let thy spirit rest, and remain united to the ineffable and incomprehensible being by an ardent charity. It is an act of love, silent, but intense and most pure, which is here counselled by the great mystic. For this union which he recommends is operated by love, as he remarks elsewhere: "This intimate union, this fusion produced by divine love, is a thing which surpasses the capacity of vulgar minds" . . . for "love is a unifying force" (*Divine Names*, IV, 12). The result will be the deification of the soul: "deification is, according to the measure of possibility, resemblance to and union with God"[1] (*Hier. Eccl.*, I, 3).

[1] Notice again the words which follow those quoted: they show that Denis set before himself the same idea of perfection since adopted by other mystics. "The common term of every hierarchy"—the hierarchy as explained by our author has been organised by God to lead creatures up to their perfection—"is charity towards God, charity produced in a holy manner by the breath of God, which unites the soul to him. . . . But, in the first place, we must be stripped of everything which is contrary to him . . . then we learn to know things in the reality of their being (things of time as passing, other things as eternal). Then we approach the truth and participate in the perfection which simplifies. And in what does this simplification consist? In elevation (above sensible and miserable beings) to the divine simplicity. This is the banquet of contemplation . . . a banquet wholly celestial and divine."

Denis then establishes these two truths: the mystical state is a favour from God, to which it would be madness to think to raise oneself by one's own powers, but it is a favour to which one ought to aspire, for which one can and ought to dispose oneself.

16. Such is the mystical doctrine of Denis. And what is no doubt his great good fortune is that the holy doctors of the Middle Ages found in it exactly described the divine operations which they experienced themselves.[1] They also found no better means of expressing themselves than to borrow for their own use the terms he employed; repose or quietude, silence, transport, contemplation, union, terms which were to become classical, and would form the language of the mystic.

3. *Signification of the word "Mystical."*

17. But the word *mystical* itself; what is its meaning and signification?

Denis insists strongly on this point that the truth grasped while in the mystical state is unspeakable, inexpressible. It has not then that precision which permits of explanation in clear and comprehensible terms. It is grasped in a confused manner, and is therefore called mystical, that is, mysterious, hidden.

This has been very well explained by Blessed Albert the Great in his *Commentary* on Denis. Blessed Albert puts forward this objection: "No science can be said to be mystical, for that which is known according to its principles is brought into full daylight, and cannot be called mystical." He answers: "That science which proceeds from the gifts of reason brings into full daylight the truths which it deduces, but this science (mystical) does not proceed from the gifts of reason; it proceeds rather from a *certain divine light*, which is

[1] The Ven. Mother Mary of the Incarnation used to say of Denis: "According to the impression made on me, I would say that he surpasses all other authors who have treated of these subjects, and I am persuaded that he was himself illuminated by divine lights." (*Vie* by Dom Claude Martin, ch. xix, addition.)

not the affirmation, clear and precise, of a truth. The object grasped by the soul (which is God himself) acts so strongly on the intelligence that the soul desires to be united to him at any price. This object, being above the grasp of the understanding, is not made known clearly, neither can the intelligence find rest in anything which is not clearly determined" (*In libr. De Myst. Theol.*, Q, proem. ad I).[1]

[1] We have given other very remarkable texts of the same doctor (*Vie d'Union*, Nos. 204 to 211).

CHAPTER III

TEACHING OF THE FATHERS CONCERNING THE MYSTICAL STATE

1. *Clement of Alexandria—Hesychius.*

18. Among the Greek Fathers it was Denis who spoke with the greatest precision concerning the nature of mystical science, and who popularised this name. The other Fathers also spoke of this higher knowledge of God which he himself communicates to pure hearts, and which human reasonings are powerless to procure. They also taught that in order to attain to it one must renounce sensible images, despoil oneself of earthly affections, and live in great purity of heart.

19. Such is the doctrine of Clement of Alexandria, as early as the third century. According to his teaching, when the soul has been liberated from the frivolities of the senses, from all the faults which are the consequence of vain or erroneous ideas or sensual passions, then she will receive the light which will sanctify her. The greater number of men, not knowing how to free themselves from their passions, have not just ideas of God; they make for themselves a God according to their own image; the true knowledge of God is a gift which he gives through the merits of his Son. We do not come to this knowledge of the Sovereign Good, of the blissful and eternal being, without a special grace which gives wings to the soul, and allows it to soar up even to God. He who has received this notable grace has become a man illuminated, a gnostic, a contemplative; holily indifferent to the things of earth, he remains constantly united to God by prayer and by love.[1]

[1] See *Vie d'Union*, where other texts are given, which we think it superfluous to repeat here.

20. In the book entitled *De libertate mentis*, formerly attributed to St Macarius, but composed by a much later author (*P.G.*, XXXIV, col. 951), we find it said: "The divine apostle St Paul, wishing to teach us more exactly what is, in every believing soul, the mystery of Christianity in its perfection, tells us that it is produced by the divine operation, and this operation is the celestial irradiation operated by the power of the Holy Spirit. (22) This illumination of the spirit is constant and continuous, an irradiation from the substantial light. (25) Every soul which, by its own efforts and by a perfect faith, renders itself worthy to put on Christ by the power of grace, and to be united to the celestial light of the incorruptible being, receives the understanding of celestial mysteries."

Hesychius, priest of Jerusalem, † 433 (*P.G.*, XCIII; Centurie xxix) bears witness no less clearly to those higher lights which are bestowed by the Lord upon the faithful and generous soul, and raise it to contemplation:

"If thou dost apply thyself to retain in the secret place of thy heart sentiments of humility and wisdom, keeping carefully the memory of death, offering to Jesus thy groans and supplications, if thou walkest with vigilance and purity in the path of the intelligence, narrow indeed but sweet and delicious; provided with these weapons, thou wilt come to the holy contemplations of the Saints, and profound mysteries will be illuminated for thee by Christ, in whom are hid all the treasures of knowledge and wisdom, in whom dwells corporally the plenitude of the divinity. Thou shalt feel that Jesus has poured into thy soul the Holy Spirit, by whom the spirit of man is enlightened."

"As coal produces a flame, much more will God, who dwells in the heart by baptism, if he find the atmosphere of the soul purified from the breath of evil, and carefully kept under the guardianship of the reason, much more will he light up our understanding in order that it may give itself to contemplation, as fire enkindles wax" (2e Centurie, No. 3).

"The custody of our hearts deserves to be called the generator of lights [here follow four words which

all signify illumination]; this guardianship of the heart surpasses all that is sensible; it is more precious than many virtues. By reason of the lights which it produces, it also merits the most honourable titles. Those who aspire to these precious lights, sinners though they be, useless beings, stained, ignorant, senseless, may, through Jesus Christ, become just, useful, pure, holy, full of wisdom; they can become contemplatives, and be transpierced with the ray of the infinite light. They dwell and live in this light because they have tasted how sweet the Lord is. . . . In truth, yes in very truth, these alone offer true prayers and worthy homage to God, with whom they delight to converse because they love him" (*ibid.*, No. 69).

2. *St Basil—St Gregory of Nyssa—St Maximus.*

21. St Basil, in the preface to his book on the monastic constitutions, shows us what is the end and aim of the monastic and cenobitic life. "He who desires to be stripped of the goods of this world . . . consecrates his life to God, makes profession of chastity, and, in order to remain faithful thereto, undertakes violent and generous combats against his passions. He thus becomes inflamed with love for God; he desires to participate, at least in a certain measure, in the impassibility, in the spiritual purity, in the calm and tranquillity, in the meekness of his beloved, and to taste the joys and delights which these dispositions produce. As every terrestrial and sensual passion is a source of trouble for the soul, he hastens to cast all thought of them far from him. When the eye of the soul has thus become pure and unshadowed, *he contemplates divine things, by reason of the light from on high, which fills him abundantly without satiating him.* When this state has become by exercise habitual, he is *united with God*, to whose likeness he has attained in the highest measure possible, and to whom he has become especially dear. After he has undergone painful conflicts and has succeeded in liberating his spirit, in spite of its bondage to matter, from all admixture of

sensible passions, he has become capable of intercourse with God. It is just and fitting that he who, by the efforts of which we have spoken, has reached this state, should never again allow himself to be enticed by the desires of the flesh; neither should he permit the vapours of vile passions to trouble his soul, nor to cover its eyes with a thick veil, and thus cause it to lose its spiritual and divine contemplation."

The doctrine here laid down by St Basil is common to all the masters; let a man fight valiantly against nature, let him practise true detachment; thus he will acquire purity of soul, and there will be communicated to him a celestial light which will be the commencement of contemplation, and of a true love of God!

Let us listen to the same doctor explaining the first verse of Psalm xxxii, *Exultate justi in Domino:* "Rejoice, ye just, in the Lord; rejoice, not in the prosperity of your domestic affairs, your good health or your abundant harvests, but because you have a God who is so good, so beautiful, and so wise. Let this joy suffice you. . . . The Scriptures thus exhort the just to understand what an honour is theirs in being the servants of such a master, to find in it an unspeakable joy, and to abandon themselves to transports of delight. *Should any light falling on your heart give you a sudden knowledge of God*, and *enlighten* your soul so as to communicate to it *the love of God and contempt of the world and of all earthly things*, this will give you a feeble and passing image of the state of those just souls who taste in God a joy which is permanent and stable."

In connection with this verse of Psalm xliv, *Speciosus forma prae filiis hominum*, Thou art more beautiful than all the children of men, St. Basil makes the following reflections:

"It is evident that the prophet (David), having contemplated the dazzling beauty of the Lord, and being wholly lost in the splendour which streams from it, feels his heart wounded and filled with an ardent love for this beauty, which is all of the spirit. *When this*

[1] Cf. *Vie d'Union*, Table analytique IV, means to be employed in order to dispose ourselves to receive God.

beauty is revealed to the human soul, all things that she loved before appear to her vile and contemptible."

"He who desires to attain to the contemplation of God," says St. Gregory of Nyssa, "must purify his understanding of all that is sensible and material, casting far from his spirit all that comes to it by way of the senses; the soul must renounce all commerce with its partner, the body; then alone can it approach the mountain."

"This rugged mountain, so difficult of access, whose lower slopes alone are known to the ordinary mind, what is it but the theology or science of God?"[1]

"When the soul is recollected in herself," says St Maximus, "and when she gives herself up to divine contemplation, she mounts above sensible forms, above the conceptions of the mind, and even, I would dare to say, above her own acts, in order *to receive the ray of celestial knowledge*" (Cent. V, 69).

3. *St Augustine—St Gregory the Great.*

22. In his book, *De Doctrina Christiana* (Book II, chap. 7), Saint Augustine enumerates the degrees by which we attain to wisdom.

Before all else, we must turn to God by holy fear, in order to understand his will and know both what he has forbidden and what he has commanded. This fear ought to bring to our minds the thought of death. Then, piety must render us meek and docile to receive the lessons of Holy Scripture. This must be followed by knowledge; we must study the Scriptures, in which we learn that God is to be loved for himself, and our neighbour for God; that we must love God with our whole heart and soul, and our neighbour as ourselves. We learn also from the Scriptures that as long as we are held captive by attachments to temporal things, we are still far from that great love of God and of our neighbour which they prescribe. Then, thanks to fear, which makes us dread the judgements of God, and to

[1] This word *theology* is often used by the Fathers to designate that superior knowledge of God obtained by the light of grace. Cf. *Vie d'Union*, Nos. 53, 54, 57, 58, 74, 141, etc.

piety, which renders us apt to learn the lessons of Holy Scripture, we cannot but weep over ourselves. Thence arise ardent prayers to obtain help from God, and the soul enters upon the fourth degree, that of fortitude, by which we hunger and thirst after justice, and by which we are detached from affection to the poisonous enjoyment of things passing, and become enamoured of things eternal, with God, One and Three.

Contemplating this Holy Trinity, which shines with so vivid a light, and understanding that by reason of our human frailty we cannot bear so great a glory, passing on to the fifth degree, that of the counsel of mercy, we endeavour to purify our souls, still agitated and troubled by the stains which come from its base passions.

In the next place we must apply ourselves ardently to practise the love of our neighbour, and when we have reached the love of our enemies we enter into the sixth degree. Here the eye of the soul is purified and made fit for the contemplation of God, as far as he can be contemplated by those who are striving with all their might to die to the world. For, *only in so far as they die to the world are they able to contemplate God, and in so far as they yet live to the world are they hindered from contemplating him.* Although the light that is shown to them is already more certain, nevertheless, *God is always seen in enigma* and in a mirror, because as long as we are in this life, *we walk by faith and not by sight.* In this sixth degree, the eye of the soul is so thoroughly purified that truth is preferred before all else, and the heart becomes so upright and so pure, that neither to please men, nor to avoid any kind of suffering, would it turn aside from the truth.

Lastly, the seventh degree is reached, which is wisdom, wherein is found the enjoyment of God in peace and tranquillity. This wisdom, which is the highest degree, is thus defined elsewhere by St Augustine: "Science," he says, "consists in flying from evil, and *wisdom in the knowledge and love of the Eternal,* the unchangeable, who is no other than God" (*Enarr. in Ps.* cxxxv, *P.L.* xxxvii, c. 1760).

23. Amongst the Fathers of the Latin Church, the great St Gregory is the surest and most complete interpreter of mystical doctrine. It would take too much space to quote all the passages in which this great Pope speaks of the lights accorded to contemplatives. Let one suffice: "He who lives the interior life receives the *light* of contemplation; those who, on the contrary, are too much preoccupied with exterior things do not know what emanations of eternal light reach the soul through the chinks of contemplation.[1] It is not indeed by images and sensible forms that the invisible light can be obtained. He who aspires to receive this contemplative light ought to guard the humility of his heart with extreme care, so as never to glorify himself for the grace which has been poured into his heart. He must understand why contemplative souls are here symbolised by 'slanting windows';[2] by a slanting window light may penetrate, but the thief cannot enter. In the same way, if the true contemplative keeps himself always in sentiments of profound humility, his mind may be reached by the light of contemplation, but pride will find no entrance" (*In Ezechiel;* Book II, Hom. 5, No. 18).

[1] The holy doctor had just said that the light obtained by contemplatives is very small (compared with the plenitude which enlightens the elect), but this little suffices to dilate their hearts and increase in them fervour and love.

[2] St Gregory is here commenting on this passage of Ezechiel: *Et fenestras obliquas in thalamis* (Ez. xl 16).

CHAPTER IV

THE MYSTICAL STATE ACCORDING TO THE DOCTORS OF THE MIDDLE AGES

1. *St Bernard.*

24. ACCORDING to St Bernard, to desire the kiss of the spouse, which he calls the kiss of contemplation, is to desire "the spirit of wisdom and understanding: understanding by which we attain to the knowledge of God, wisdom by which we taste what has been grasped by the understanding." "*The favour of the kiss,*" he says again, "*includes two things, light and unction. . . .* Let the spouse then prepare her two lips, her reason, seat of understanding, and her will, seat of wisdom, that she may receive the double grace of the holy kiss."

"In the blessed gift of contemplation there are two kinds of transports, *one is in the understanding, the other in the affection; one is in light, the other in fervour; one in knowledge, the other in devotion.*"

The holy doctor says again: "This kiss, which the loving soul solicits, is the imparting of divine joy"—these joys are evidently those of love—"the revelation of heavenly secrets, a certain wonderful and wholly ineffable mingling of the celestial light which enlightens the soul, and the soul which is illuminated by it. Rightly, then, do I desire neither visions nor dreams. I turn away from parables and metaphors, even angelic glories I hold in disdain. For even these Jesus, who is mine, by his fairness and majesty far surpasses" (*In Cantico*, Sermo 2).

St Bernard shows clearly that these most precious lights and these sweetnesses of love are a favour, an infused grace, and not a contemplation or union acquired by the efforts of the soul itself. "Not to all men does it belong to take these words upon their lips

with sincere desire; he alone is able to do so who has received, even once only, the spiritual kiss from the lips of Christ. Such an one is incessantly urged by his own experience to obtain a repetition of that which he found so full of sweetness. It is my strong opinion that no one can comprehend what it is except he who has experienced it; it is, as it were, a hidden manna, and he who tastes of it still hungers. It is a fountain sealed from which no stranger may draw; but he who drinks of it still thirsts to drink again" (*In Cantico*, Sermo 3).

2. *St Thomas.*

25. St Thomas again indicates very clearly the parts played by the understanding and the heart in contemplation when he pictures the contemplative fixing his mind upon God because he loves him. The holy doctor declares at the same time that we ought to dispose ourselves for the act of contemplation by calling to mind the greatness and goodness of God. "The contemplative life," he says, "consists, above all, in an operation of the understanding; even the name contemplation shows this, for it signifies vision, gaze. The chief aim of the contemplative is to reach this gaze of contemplation, and for this end he makes use of considerations and reasonings. . . . Although visible creatures are the road by which we arrive at the contemplation of the divine, nevertheless, contemplation does not consist chiefly in that which is only the road (the preceding considerations), but in that to which the road leads (the gaze fixed on God)" (III *Sent.*, D. 35, Q. 1, a. 2, sol. 2).

Mystical contemplation is not, in the eyes of St Thomas, a kind of prayer which can be acquired, and which is exercised by the simple use of the faculties of the soul, since the holy doctor constantly maintains—in agreement with all the other doctors without exception—that it is the effect of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and he specially names the gift of wisdom. *Contemplatio aliquando capitur stricte pro actu intellectus divina meditantis et sic contemplatio est sapientiae actus* (IV *Sent.*, D. 15, Q. 4, a. 1, sol. 2, ad 1).

Let us again quote some words of St Thomas, which show further what part he attributes in the mystical state to the faculties of knowing and loving.

"The gift of wisdom procures an eminent knowledge by a certain union with divine things, with which we can only be united by love, in such sort that he who adheres to God may be but one spirit with him.

"Our Lord says that he has revealed the secrets of his Father to his disciples because they were his friends. The gift of wisdom also presupposes love as its origin, and for this reason its seat is in the affections; but as to its essence, it is in the understanding. From this it follows that the act of wisdom both here below and among the blessed appears to be the contemplation of those divine things which we love, and by them to judge concerning other things, not only in that which is speculative, but also in that which is practical" (III *Sent.*, D. 35, Q. 2, a. 1, sol. 3; *cf. ibid.*, D. 36, Q. 1, a. 3, c. et ad 4—II-II, Q. 45, a. 5).

"The desire of contemplation is born of love of the object to be contemplated; therefore the contemplative life is impossible without love. If, however, contemplation necessitates love, it consists essentially in an act of the faculty of knowing. As St. Gregory says: The contemplative life consists in a whole-hearted adherence to the love of God and our neighbour, and in resting from active works in such manner that the soul does not find her contentment in action, but trampling under foot all anxiety, becomes inflamed with the desire of contemplating the face of the Creator" (III *Sent.*, D. 35, Q. 1, a. 2, sol. 1).

"The word 'understanding' seems only to denote simple perception; the word 'wisdom' indicates a full certainty in judging of that which is already perceived. But things known in this manner can only be judged by comparison with superior things to which he who is wise is spiritually united, in such a way that being placed, so to speak, in a superior position, he judges all things. *This union with divine things takes place through love.* Wisdom, then, has for its principal object divine things, which cause a delight proceeding

from the love with which they are regarded. With regard to the intelligence, it has for object all that is perceived by the mind; in itself the understanding (and consequently the gift of understanding) does not excite the pleasure caused by love" (III *Sent.*, D. 35, Q. 2, a. 2, sol. 3). Hence we can understand why the holy doctor attributes mystical contemplation, which is born of love, more to the gift of wisdom than to that of understanding.

He says again: "Just as a lamp cannot shine unless it is lighted, so the spiritual lamp does not shine unless it is enkindled by the fire of charity. Thus warmth precedes light, and it is the warmth of charity which produces the knowledge of the truth" (*In Ev. Joan.*, V, l. vi).

26. But if love is the principle of wisdom, and brings the contemplative to full light, in return, the light obtained by the gift of wisdom increases love. "There is a knowledge of the truth which is affective," says St Thomas, "producing the love of God; it belongs to the gift of wisdom" (I, Q. 64, a. 1, c).

Mystical contemplation, being the fruit of his gifts, necessitates a particular action of the Holy Spirit; the property of the gifts is, in fact, to dispose the soul to receive divine impulses, and under their influence to produce acts which in this case are chiefly those of faith and love.

"Man is moved by the Holy Spirit," says St Thomas, "but in such sort that he moves himself, because he is a free being: he has also need of a *habitus: Homo sic agitur a Spiritu Sancto quod etiam agit, in quantum est liberi arbitii: unde indiget habitu*" (I, 1, Q. 68, a. 3, ad 2). And commenting on the text of St Paul: "All those who are led by the spirit of God are children of God" (Rom. viii 14), St. Thomas says: "Not only is the spiritual man instructed by the Holy Spirit concerning what he ought to do, but his heart also is stirred by this divine spirit . . . he is urged to action, not principally by the movement of his own will, but by the impulse of the Holy Spirit." Elsewhere he says: "The qualities proper to the Holy Spirit are

found in the spiritual man just as the qualities of fire are found in burning coals" (*In Joan.*, III).

27. But in order that the action of the Holy Spirit may find full play, that this spirit of love and holiness may thus transform him in whom it operates, it must meet with no obstacles to oppose its action.

"The gifts are goods which are given to us by God himself, but in order that they may exercise their functions man must be freed from what is evil: *Quamvis dona sint quaedam bona a Deo data, tamen ad hoc quod possint habere debitas operationes, oportet quod a malis liberetur homo*" (III Sent., D. 34, Q. 7, a. 6, ad 3).

This purity of soul is necessary, not only for the exercise of the gift of wisdom, which presupposes an ardent love, but also for the gift of understanding. "The gift of understanding necessitates a heart so pure that it shall not only be exempt from the seduction of the passions, but the soul must also be freed from error, as well as from the representations of the imagination and from intellectual conceptions (reasonings). The purity here spoken of is not bestowed by the gift of understanding, but rather its acquisition by the works of the active life is presupposed. From all these things, according to the teaching of St Denis, must those be separated who are tending to divine contemplation" (III *Sent.*, D. 34, Q. 1, ad 4).

28. St Thomas has just said that purity of soul acquired by means of the works of a perfect active life is presupposed: *Munditia . . . praesupponitur per vitam activam perfectam:* it is the constant teaching of the holy doctor that the virtues of the active life precede and prepare the way for the contemplative life. "The active life disposes to the contemplative life; as St Isidore says: He who has first made good progress in the active life may rise to contemplation. Therefore, in so far as a man has not reached the perfection of the active life, the contemplative life cannot be found in him, or, at least, no more than a very imperfect beginning of it. But when the active life is perfect, then the works of the moral virtues become easy, a

man is no longer hindered by them from devoting himself to contemplation. It is, however, according to the degree of his greater or less perfection in the active life that he is able to combine more or less the active life with that of contemplation. It is the duty of superiors to be perfect in each of these; for, being mediators between God and the people, they receive from God by contemplation, and they give to the people by action. They must also be perfect in the practice of the moral virtues. The same holds good for preachers, otherwise neither would be worthy to undertake their office" (III *Sent.*, D. 35, Q. 1, a. 3, sol. 3).

"There are some," he says again, "who devote themselves especially to the active life, while they perform from time to time acts of contemplation; some, setting less value on the works of the active life, give themselves up to contemplation, while others apply themselves to both. There are, however, certain functions which necessitate the two, such as preaching and instruction. These, indeed, begun in contemplation, terminate in action, as effects proceed from their cause" (III *Sent.*, D. 35, Q. 1, a. 1, ad 5).

"The exercise of the moral and intellectual virtues precedes the gifts, for by the very fact that a man orders his conduct well according to the laws of reason is he disposed to a right conduct with regard to God" (I-II, Q. 68, a. 8, ad 2).

In the following passage St Thomas shows in what the life of the contemplative consists. "By the consideration of sublime things to judge of lower matters, and to order them rightly, is a human exercise which is operated by the intellectual virtue of wisdom. But to be united with these sublime objects by becoming like unto them—in such a manner that being united with God we become but one with God—and by virtue of this very union enabled to draw our judgements from the inmost recesses of our being" (from that depth wherein resides the God with whom we are united), "and not only to value at a true rate those things which can be known, but to order our own actions and govern our passions, this is above the power of man and

brought about by the gift of wisdom" (III *Sent.*, D. 73, a. 2, Q. 3, ad 6).

29. From these quotations and those we have given elsewhere, it follows clearly that St Thomas in no wise agrees with so many writers since the seventeenth century who have considered mystical contemplation as a state outside the ordinary way, as a favour belonging to those graces *gratis datae* reserved for a small number and requiring a very special vocation. According to him, contemplation is the fruit of the gifts of the Holy Spirit when these are fully developed in the faithful soul. When this soul has been purified by means of the works of the active life and the practice of virtues, when she has acquired an ardent love, and when she has removed the obstacles which were opposed to the free exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, this divine spirit communicates to her the lights of the gift of wisdom, and instils into her heart a new love. He transforms her into himself, as fire transforms the coals which it enkindles: thus, the contemplative life is the proper effect of perfect love.[1]

3. *St Bonaventure.*

30. St Bonaventure has the same conception of mystical contemplation as St Thomas. His description of the gift of wisdom and its effects shows that he sees therein the source of the delights tasted by the contemplative soul, delights which he explains partly by a certain knowledge given to the soul differing from that obtained by the use of reason, and partly by feelings of love. "The word 'wisdom,'" he says (III *Sent.*, D. 35, a. 1, Q. 1), "taken in its proper sense, designates the experimental knowledge of God. It is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, and is brought into play when the soul tastes divine sweetness. In order that the soul may experience these interior tastes which produce delight, there must be *union by means of the affective faculties* as well as *perception by the*

[1] In *La Vie d'Union* may be found other passages of the holy doctor expressing the same doctrine. We wished only to cite here those which are not quoted in that work.

faculty of knowing. The acts of the gift of wisdom are then *partly intellectual and partly affective; they begin in the understanding, they are completed and perfected in the affection;* the spiritual taste is, in fact, the experimental knowledge of what is sweet and good. The exercise of the gift of wisdom is then especially an act of the affective faculty. . . . St Gregory says that the function of wisdom is to stir up the soul; Denis declares that 'the characteristic of this wisdom is to be without reasoning, because the idea which we form for ourselves of God by negation and abstraction —and not by reasoning—is a far better disposition towards loving him than the positive knowledge' which reason furnishes."

Speaking elsewhere of this gift of wisdom (*Coll. de Donis Spir. Sancti*, 9) the holy doctor writes: "It is true that this gift comes from God, but if you wish for it you must desire it, for wisdom can only enter into a soul which aspires very ardently to possess it, and to such a soul it will not be refused."

Treating of the gift of understanding, he says: "The effect of this gift is to raise the soul to the contemplation of the sovereign Verity by the aid of a light which not only causes this Verity to be accepted, but once received makes it understood as it ought to be understood. . . . The object, then, of the gift of understanding is eternal truth . . . the act of this gift is to contemplate the truth already believed by faith, to cause it to be believed more piously, and to make it loved more ardently." (III. *Sent.*, Dist. 35, Q. 3).

In his celebrated opuscule *Itinerarium mentis ad Deum* the seraphic doctor marks out the path which leads the soul to God, to whom she ought to be united by a contemplation which is all love. She must dispose herself for this contemplation first by the consideration of the works of God, then of God himself. It will not, however, be the fruit of any human efforts nor result from her meditations, but it will be a very precious gift from God and the work of the Holy Spirit. It is a mystical wisdom and a love communicated by this divine Spirit, a love which carries its fire into the very

depth of our being, and bestows a peace which is above all understanding. The holy doctor goes on to tell us that God invites all truly spiritual men to lose themselves thus in transports of love: *Omnes viros vere spirituales Deus . . . invitat ad hujusmodi transitum et mentis excessum.*

31. We can now understand a further passage from the same holy doctor, which also sums up admirably the teaching of all the other masters: "Contemplation is a favour, but a favour for which we ought carefully to prepare by separating ourselves from all creatures, and, were it possible, from ourselves. This is the supreme degree of union which is brought about by love. *Contemplatio fit per gratiam; tamen ad hoc juvat industria, scilicet ut se separet homo ab omni eo quod Deus non est et etiam a seipso, si possible est. Et haec est suprema unitio per amorem*" (*In Hex.*, Col. II., No. 30).

In this same work St Bonaventure distinguishes three states which may be found in the faithful soul: that of a natural and reasonable prudence in which she governs her powers and feelings by the use of the lights of reason: *industriae cum natura;* then that of a prudence which also operates by natural means, but is founded on faith and in which the soul is governed by the lights received from grace: *industriae cum gratia.* Lastly, there is the state of grace surpassing nature and human industry: *gratiae super naturam et industriam;* here the soul, raised above her own being and forsaking herself, receives divine illuminations and contemplates those things above herself which it is given to her to contemplate. By this road she ascends into the heavens, she is raised even to things divine. Here are also three things: reception of graces, illumination, union: *quando scilicet anima supra se elevata est et se deserta suscipit divinas illuminationes, et supra se speculatur quod sibi datum est; et ex hoc surgit in divina sive sursum agitur. Ista tria sunt; susceptio, revelatio, unio* (*In Hexam.* Col. XXII, Nos. 23, 26, 27).

In his treatise *De perfectione vitae ad sorores*, the holy doctor shows again (chap. v) how the mystical state should result from prayer. He thus addresses the

religious soul: Be constant and fervent in prayer "until you are able to penetrate into the house of God, and there, having tasted that the Lord is sweet, cast yourself into his arms, give him the kisses of a very tender devotion and then, separated from yourself, wholly ravished into heaven and transformed into Christ, you will be no longer able to hold your soul back." Most clearly, it is a prayer all of love which St Bonaventure here describes, an ardent love for which we must prepare our souls, but which is communicated by God alone to those whom he takes to himself, whom he introduces into the secret place of his dwelling.

Elsewhere he says again: "Although the practice of all the virtues seems to tend towards perfection, yet prayer has a special power of drawing the soul towards God with the whole understanding, the whole memory, all her love; being detached from all else, the soul seeks by prayer to attach herself to God alone. Thence it follows that prayer is perfect when the soul attains what she seeks for by praying—namely, that forsaking all inferior things she may be united with God alone, neither wishing nor being able to think of aught but him" (*De prof. relig.*, II, 72).

32. In his commentary on the *Book of the Sentences*, St Bonaventure expresses the same doctrine.

After explaining how the human soul, even before its original fall, could not see God in himself, which is reserved for the state of glory, the seraphic doctor adds. 7

"I acknowledge, however, that the soul's gaze can be fixed on God in such a manner that she sees nothing out of him; but even in this case she does not perceive the pure splendour of divine light, for even while she is thus raised towards God, she dwells in obscurity. This higher knowledge is obtained by forgetting all creatures. This is taught by Denis in his book of Mystical Theology, and he calls this knowledge 'learned ignorance.' In this state the heart is on fire with an admirable love, and those only will understand what we say who from time to time experience mystical transports. As for this manner of knowing God, I believe that *every faithful soul here below ought to aspire to it.* If

God accords her anything beyond this, it will be as a special privilege outside the common law" (II *Sent.*, D. 73, a. 2, Q. 3, ad 6).

We see, then, that we do not leave the common law, or to speak a more modern language, the common way, when we obtain that mystical knowledge to which every faithful soul ought to aspire; it is not to receive an extraordinary grace, as so many modern writers wrongly maintain, but an eminent grace. This is expressly declared by the seraphic doctor in the same article, in which he reserves to visions and apparitions the name of special, that is, extraordinary, graces.

"There are four ways of knowing God: by faith, by contemplation, by an apparition, or by clear vision. The first is a common grace, *primum est gratiae communis;* the second is an eminent grace, *gratiae excellentis;* the third is a grace of a special nature, *gratiae specialis;* the fourth is in the consummation of glory" (*ibid. in c.*).

33. This superior knowledge of God, and the love which accompanies it, are the fruit of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. All the greatest doctors teach it expressly; St Bonaventure declares it no less plainly, as we have seen, and declares also that it is the gifts which establish the soul in perfection. "The *habitus* of the virtues," he says, "dispose especially to the active life; the *habitus* of the gifts prepare the way for the repose of contemplation" (*Brevilog.*, p. 5, cap. vi, No. 6).

"The virtues are exercised by those yet in an imperfect state, while the gifts lead a man to the state of perfection; it follows that the gifts are more perfect than the virtues, as the state of those making progress is more perfect than that of beginners" (III *Sent.*, D. 34, p. 1, a. 1). "Souls who are not yet raised to contemplation," he says again, "are as if in their winter-time; those who are raised to a certain degree of contemplation are as if in their spring; those who are exalted to ecstatic transports[1] are in their summer, and they reap the fruits of autumn, for they have reached repose" (*In Hexam.*, Nos. 9, 10, 11).

[1] By ecstatic transports the holy doctor does not mean ecstasy, but those darts of love in which the soul forgets herself to think only on her beloved. (See *Vie d'Union*, No. 218; *cf. infra*, No. 204.)

CHAPTER V

TEACHING OF ST TERESA ON THE MYSTICAL STATE

34. The question of the nature of the mystical state cannot be adequately discussed without reference to the teaching of the two most illustrious spiritual writers of the sixteenth century, St Teresa and St John of the Cross.[1]

1. *Distinction made by St Teresa between states of prayer which can be acquired and those which are infused.*

35. In her writings St Teresa frequently returns to the fundamental difference which exists between those states of prayer which can be reached by human working and those which necessitate infused elements, and for that very reason cannot be procured by our own efforts, even assisted by common grace. She calls these latter *supernatural;* at the present day they are usually called *mystical.* After saying that feelings of tenderness, tears, meditation are things which, with the help of God, can be acquired here below—*que aca podemos adquirir*—she declares that she is now going

[1] In all the passages which we quote from these two great mystics we shall keep as close as possible to the original text; therefore our phrases will be less elegant than those of other translators, as we wish above all things to be very faithful. In such delicate matters one word added or badly translated often suffices to prevent the exact rendering of the thought. In quoting from St Teresa, the references are given to the new and excellent Burgos edition of her works which is in course of publication. In the *Way of Perfection* Bouix counts two chapters, the fourth and fifth, where the other editors only have one, St Teresa herself having corrected her own work and having indicated that these two chapters ought to be united in one. It follows that, from chapter five onwards, the edition of Bouix is one chapter behind. Thus, when we indicate chapter thirty, it will be thirty-first of Bouix's edition.

to speak of supernatural graces. "I call supernatural those which cannot be acquired by our own efforts—*no se puede adquirir*—however great these efforts may be. But we can dispose ourselves to receive them, and we ought to regard it as of the highest importance to do so." She then enumerates as supernatural states recollection (passive), quietude,[1] etc. (*Letter* to P. Rodr. Alvarez, *Relacion* V, p. 31).

In her *Life* (chap. x, p. 70), being anxious to distinguish the kind of prayer which she calls "mystical theology" from another which she had previously enjoyed, and which is certainly affective prayer, she says: "Formerly, I used frequently to enjoy a tenderness of devotion which, in some measure, it seems to me, may be procured. . . . For I think that we can help ourselves a great deal in the acquisition of it by considering our own baseness and our ingratitude, etc." Again she calls "'acquired"—*adquirida*—that devotion which may be obtained by thus working with the understanding (chap. xii, p. 80). In "mystical theology," on the contrary, God intervenes directly. He suspends the action of the reasoning powers by affording lights. He supplies the soul with matter wherewith to occupy itself and ravish it with astonishment (chap. xii, p. 88). In chapter xiv (p. 104), she again calls *supernatural* that prayer which she symbolises by the second water, or the second manner of watering the garden, and she declares that she particularly desires to be able to explain well the difference there is between the general assistance (given by God to souls in meditation) and the particular succour (which produces contemplation) (p. 103).

In the *Way of Perfection*, treating of "quietude" (chap. xxxi, p. 143), she says: "It is something supernatural which we can never procure for ourselves, whatever efforts we may make." "Do not expect to be able, by your own strength and your own efforts, to arrive thus far" (chap. xxxii, p. 156).

[1] Those writers are in manifest contradiction to St Teresa who call the different states of contemplative prayer here described by the Saint, *acquired contemplation.*

In the *Interior Castle*, speaking of the fourth mansion, St Teresa insists strongly on this principle of distinction between what she calls *contentments*, sweet emotions which we acquire—*adquirimos*—by pious considerations, which proceed from our own nature—*procede de nuestro natural* (p. 46), and the spiritual "tastes" which God produces directly in the soul. She notes this difference as the characteristic mark of superior states, which here again she names supernatural (chap. iii, 59).[1]

2. *Ecstatic States.*

36. Above the *supernatural* kinds of prayer for which we ought to try to dispose ourselves, there are others which are truly *extraordinary* favours, for, according to the Saint, we have no right to desire them; they are those in which the use of the senses is suspended: union, which is the first degree of ecstasy, ecstasy properly so called, ravishment and the flight of the spirit.

We are about to see how very differently St Teresa speaks of the first and of the second.

She very clearly points out this difference when, describing in succession the various states of prayer, she approaches those which are ecstatic, beginning with that of *union* (*Life*, chap. xviii, 129).

In the first place she declares that she feels more vividly the need of divine succour to explain these new kinds of prayer.

"In the preceding prayer"—this was the sleep of the powers, which is a supernatural but not ecstatic state, which the Saint calls the third water, or third manner of watering the garden—"the soul feels that she is not entirely dead. I say, not entirely, for she is, however, dead to the world. But, as I have said, *she has sufficiently the use of her senses* to understand that she is

[1] Without being aware of it, St Teresa is in admirable agreement with theologians, since the latter speak of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as the source of contemplation, and point out as the distinctive characteristic of the gifts the "ultra-human" manner in which the soul receives lights and impulses directly from God without the aid of reason.

in the world, and to feel her solitude, and she employs exterior things to make what she feels understood at least by some visible signs.[1] In all those states of which I have hitherto spoken "—supernatural but not ecstatic —"the gardener is obliged to labour a little; but it is most true that in these latter"—quietude and sleep of the powers—"the work is performed with such delight and glory that the soul would wish it should never cease; it is less a labour than glory."[2]

"Here"—in the kind of prayer she is endeavouring to describe—"there is *no longer the use of the senses (aca no hay sentir)*; the soul is all enjoyment without understanding what it is she enjoys. She sees that she enjoys a good which contains all good, but which remains incomprehensible. *All the senses are absorbed in this enjoyment, so that no single one retains enough liberty to apply itself to anything whatever, either interior or exterior.* Previously they had been free, as I have said, to give some exterior signs of what they were experiencing, but now the pleasure which is tasted is greater beyond all comparison and is far less easily expressed: *the body is now powerless and the soul can no longer communicate by its agency what she feels. . . .*

"When there is this union of all the powers, the soul could not, even if she would, manifest her joy; if she is capable of so doing, it is no longer union. As to the nature and manner of this prayer which is called union,[3]

[1] "Por senas," for example, by her attitude, her sighs, etc.

[2] In Spanish the word "glory" is usually employed to describe celestial happiness; here the word is used for happiness.

[3] Père Poulain (*Grâces d'oraison*, XVIII, 3) reproaches both us and other writers of committing a blunder in attributing to union what the Saint here says of the fourth water (ch. xviii and xix of her *Life*). According to him, this fourth water should be ecstasy. It would then be in ch. xvi that union is described, in which case the Saint would have confused union with spiritual sleep, thus giving to the latter a meaning different from that which she attributes to it in other passages. From this he concludes that the "union" of St Teresa, which he calls "full union," only differs from quietude by the degree of its intensity and the absence of distractions. The blunder was not made by us: whoever reads the Spanish text will be convinced that there is no possible doubt. In fact, it is Bouix, and not St Teresa, as this author has believed and declared, who at the end of ch. xviii employs the word ecstasy.

I do not know how to make them understood. . . . In the earlier stages it is almost always at the end of a prolonged mental prayer that this celestial water falls from heaven. . . .

6. . . ." While she is thus seeking her God, the soul finds herself as if *sinking away* entirely under a most sweet and excessive delight; it is a *kind of swoon;* the breath begins to fail with all the corporal strengtn, so that she cannot even move her hands without great trouble. Her eyes are closed without her having any wish to close them; if she kept them open she would see scarcely anything. . . . She hears, but does not understand what she hears. *She is unable to profit in any way by the use of her senses* . . . by the loss of bodily strength that of the soul is increased that thus she may better enjoy her glory.

7. . . . "Let it be clearly understood that in my opinion this suspension of all the powers, even when prolonged more than usual, is nevertheless always of short duration. If it should continue for half-an-hour, that is very long; as for myself, I do not think I ever experienced it for so long. . . .

8. . . . "The soul then sees herself to be very close to God, and she experiences such a certainty of this that

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The Saint, on the contrary, declares expressly that in this chapter she describes the prayer *to which the name of union is given "que llaman union": she describes it absolutely as she describes that which she calls union in the sixth mansion, often employing the very same expressions,* as we shall very soon see. In ch. xvi she declares not less expressly that she is describing spiritual sleep, and all that she has said of it in different passages of her works is in perfect agreement. It would be very unjust, in our opinion, to accuse her of contradicting herself on this point. Finally, it is in ch. xx that she begins to speak of ecstasy, properly so called, and to show in what it differs from the union which she has just described; here, again, there is no possibility of doubt. Besides, if she saw nothing in union beyond a quietude more intense and without distractions, she would not have said more than once that while quietude should be the object of our desire it is not so with union.

Since this note was penned in our first edition, 1903, the Carmelites have published a new translation of the *Oeuvres de Sainte Thérèse,* 1907; like us they have recognised the gross error of P. Bouix, reproduced by P. Poulain. The latter, however, maintains his interpretation (*Grâces d'oraison*, XVII andu XVIII).

it is utterly impossible for her not to believe it. All her powers cease to work; they are so completely suspended that she can in no wise understand that they are working. . . . The will must be entirely occupied in loving, yet she does not understand how she loves. . . .

XIX, 1. . . . "Without *any act of her own will, the soul has closed the door upon all her senses,* in order the better to enjoy her God . . . she *neither sees nor hears.*"

37. In the *Fifth Mansion* of the Castle (chap. i), the Saint explains in the same way the prayer of union.

3. "In union, during the short time that it lasts, the soul remains as if *deprived of the use of her senses,* and she has not the power to think of anything, even if she would. She has need of no artifice to suspend her thoughts; she does not even understand how she loves, nor what she loves, nor what she desires. At every point she is dead to the world . . . she is drawn away from every operation which she might wish to perform with her body . . . *it might almost be said she is separated from it.* . . . 8. God has made her, as you see, a perfect simpleton, that he may better impress upon her true wisdom, for *she neither sees nor hears,* nor does she understand, whilst she is in this condition, but this state is always of short duration. . . . 10. God *does not wish that the door of the senses and powers should be opened;* he desires them to be put to sleep while he thus enters into the centre of the soul." The Saint repeats here what she has said in chap. xviii of her *Life,* that it is through the favour of having been admitted to this kind of prayer that she understands, beyond possibility of doubt, that God is present to our souls.

38. St Teresa gives another description of this prayer in her letter to P. Rodrigo Alvarez, a description perfectly agreeing with the two others. "When there is union of all the powers, these are unable to act; the mind seems to be stunned, the will loves more than it understands; but it cannot understand sufficiently to give an account of it, whether it does love, or what it is doing. As to the memory, it seems to me that it no

longer exists; there is no more thought; *the senses are not awake*, they seem *to have been lost;* and all this is, in my opinion, in order that the soul may give herself up entirely to her enjoyment. It is for this alone that during these short moments the use of the senses is in abeyance. . . . Ecstasy and suspension are, in my opinion, the same thing; I use the word "suspension" to avoid that of ecstasy, which frightens people; but the union of which I have just spoken may also very well be called a suspension; the difference which exists between union and ecstasy is that the latter lasts longer, and is shown more exteriorly; respiration seems almost to cease; one can neither speak nor open one's eyes. It is quite true that *the same thing happens in union*, but ecstasy produces this effect with much greater force." The Saint has already said in her *Life* (chap. xviii, p. 132) that the flight of the spirit and union only differ as the greater differs from the less, or a small fire from a larger one.

39. It is, then, impossible to question that the union of which St Teresa speaks in the passages just quoted is an ecstatic state; it is only the first degree of ecstasy, for it is still possible to resist, though with great difficulty (*Life*, xx, p. 146); but if there is no resistance offered, the use of the senses is lost and true ecstasy takes place. St Francis de Sales has understood the doctrine of the Saint in the same way. "The Blessed Mother Teresa says extremely well that union having reached such a perfection as to hold us closely attached to our Lord is nothing else than ravishment or suspension, but that it is only called union or suspension when its duration is short; when it lasts long it is called ecstasy or ravishment" (*Love of God*, VIII, 3).

40. It was necessary to show clearly what St Teresa meant by the prayer of union: otherwise we could not understand why she speaks so differently, as we shall soon see, of that kind of prayer and of states which are purely mystical. Through failing to notice these differences, a number of authors, and Bossuet among them, have caused regrettable confusion.

St Teresa, we repeat, does not wish anyone to desire

this prayer of ecstatic union. She declares this in two different passages (*Fifth Mansion*, chap. iii, pp. 86, 87, and *Foundations*, chap. v, p. 44), and very distinctly in both cases. The reason she gives for this is excellent: doubtless we ought to desire to reach the higher Mansions (*Fourth Mansion*, chap. i), but the Lord is able to *guide souls to these Mansions without leading them through this short cut*, " which is ecstatic union " (*Fifth Mansion*, chap. iii, p. 87). Again, the Saint having told her daughters (*Fifth Mansion*, chap. i, p. 69) that by the help of God they had almost all entered into this Fifth Mansion, added that certain experiences of which she was about to speak had occurred to only a few. We have only to read this and the following chapters to be convinced that she is speaking of the favours of ecstatic union. Besides, this entirely agrees with what she has said elsewhere (*Foundations*, chap. iv): if almost all her daughters had arrived at perfect contemplation, only a few were raised to ecstasy.

St Teresa says again: " In spite of all that I have said, there still remains some obscurity around this Fifth Mansion. Now, entrance into this Mansion confers so many advantages that it will be well not to take away all hope from those to whom the Lord has not also granted supernatural favours "—such as ecstatic union. " Indeed, true union can quite well be acquired by the help of God, if we force ourselves to have no other will than the divine will " (p. 86). Consequently those who are not raised to ecstatic union need not despair of entering into this Mansion, which has so many advantages; they will enter therein if they are faithful in renouncing their own will. At this point, in order, as she says, that no further obscurity may remain as to what is meant by this Fifth Mansion, St Teresa sets herself to explain the union of conformity to the divine will.

41. Here, then, we have the opinion of St Teresa. Extraordinary favours ought not to be desired because we can, without them, attain to sanctity. They are exceptional favours, which are not included in the ordinary providence of God over his elect. As we

shall see further on, God can communicate mystical lights of a very high order, and a great power of loving, without the suspension of the use of the senses. He can bring the soul even to the union of transformation, to spiritual marriage without according raptures. St Francis de Sales makes the same remark. "There are many saints in heaven who were never in ecstasy nor rapture of contemplation" (*Love of God*, VII, 7).

3. *States of prayer which are purely mystical.*

42. With regard to those states of prayer which we will call purely mystical, states much more common and which have about them nothing exceptional, St Teresa in agreement with the other masters describes them as most desirable. She incessantly invites her daughters to aspire to them; it is the end which she places before them, the goal towards which she directs them (see *Vie d'Union*, No. 313 *et seq.*).

To these states she gives various names; prayer of quiet or repose, "tastes," contemplation, perfect contemplation, mystical theology, spiritual sleep, or celestial inebriation. It is common to all these—and the Saint carefully notes it in each case—that the use of the senses and the powers of the soul are not lost. Even in mystical inebriation the soul is not so far beside herself that she cannot comprehend anything of what is taking place; if at times it costs her somewhat to speak, yet it is not impossible as in ecstatic prayer.[1]

These kinds of prayer are, however, greatly superior to meditation, for if in them some activity on the part of the soul is still needed, "if in all these states the gardener must still perform a portion of the work" (*Life*, xviii, p. 129), the part of God is much greater than in meditation. In this latter God only co-operates with the soul, which reflects and gives itself to salutary considerations; in supernatural prayer there are new and infused elements which all the reflection possible could not procure, and which can only come from God (*Fourth Mansion*, chaps. i and ii).

[1] *Life*, x, p. 69; xv, 6 107; xvi, p. 117. *Way of Perfection*, xxv, p. 117; xxxi, p. 144. *Thoughts on the Cant.*, iv, p. 248.

43. These various states do not differ from each other in any essential point. The Saint gives the name of *quietude* to a mystical prayer very frequently experienced by those who apply themselves seriously to the service of God, a prayer in which the soul tastes a profound peace and sensible sweetnesses, which are very consoling; in it the heart remains united to God, but the reason and imagination often cause painful distractions. She calls *spiritual sleep* or *celestial inebriation* a prayer *slightly* more elevated[1] and in which there is still less labour; in quietude we should have recourse to some very simple thought, or apply ourselves to uttering a few loving words. In spiritual sleep or celestial inebriation even this is unnecessary; all the powers of the soul are held captive and are wholly occupied with God, while there are ardent and entirely spontaneous aspirations with an outpouring of love which resembles, says St Teresa, a holy and altogether celestial transport. In *mystical theology*, as in inebriation, all the powers are captive (*Life*, x, p. 69, and xiii, p. 87), but the Saint here—and it is the only distinction she makes—portrays the soul as more calm and altogether astonished at the lights which she receives. Lastly, what the Saint says of perfect contemplation[2] may equally well be

[1] *Fourth Mansion*, ch. ii, No. 11. Again we can prove that the Saint drew no sharp line of division between quietude and sleep or inebriation, for in her *Explanation of the Canticle*, ch. iv, she describes them together and without distinguishing one from the other; and in the *Way of Perfection*, xxxi, 3, she attributes to quietude what she had said of the third water in ch. xviii, 3, of her *Life*, the persistence of this state amidst occupations and labours. Besides, it is only in her first work that St Teresa subdivides mystical prayer into so many degrees; the further she goes, the more she simplifies; in her last work (*Fourth Mansion*) she unites them all under the name of tastes, "gustos," contenting herself with the remark that spiritual sleep is a prayer a little superior to simple "tastes."

[2] *Way of Perfection*, xxv, p. 117. It is not St Teresa, but Père Bouix, who very often *paraphrases*, who calls "perfect contemplation" the prayer of which there is question in ch. xxxi, p. 147, of the *Way of Perfection*, and which the Saint compares with quietude in order to show the difference between them. This prayer is ecstatic union, for it takes place without any effort on the part of him who receives it; he has not even to swallow the milk which he finds in the most intimate depths of his being without knowing how the Lord has put it there.

applied to either of these two last states, and also to quietude when it is free from distractions,[1] but she does not call by this name ecstatic prayer.[2]

44. In all these kinds of prayer there is a true and intimate union of the soul with God; St. Teresa also frequently employs the word "union" or union of the powers in connection with them. Speaking of spiritual sleep or inebriation, she says that this prayer seems to her a manifest union of the soul with God,[3] but not a complete union of all the powers.[4] More generally she reserves the name of perfect union to ecstatic union: it appears to her that the soul is more perfectly united to God in those states in which all working is suppressed, and in which the senses have become incapable of exercising their functions.

4. *The distinctive elements of mystical prayer: I, Peace and profound satisfaction.—II, Sensible delights.—III, Ardent love.—IV, Lights.*

45. As we have said, in these mystical states are to be found, according to St Teresa, new and infused elements, for the soul cannot procure them by her own efforts; they can only come from God.

The repose of the heart in God and the profound peace which fills the heart, these are the elements on which she specially insists.

"During this prayer it is easily seen that there is a great contentment and calm of the will, but to express precisely in what it consists is impossible" (*Way of Perfection,* xxxi, p. 147). "This satisfaction is felt by the soul in her most intimate depths; she knows neither

[1] For this complete and undistracted quietude, which is truly a perfect contemplation, see especially *Way of Perfection,* ch. xxxi, towards the beginning, and *Life,* ch. xiv, p. 102: "the other powers sometimes help the will. . . ."

[2] Thus she says in ch. xxviii, p. 132, of the *Way of Perfection,* that the Lord will not refuse perfect contemplation to the soul who has been faithful to the practice of recollection; evidently it is not an ecstatic prayer that the Saint here has in view.

[3] "*Union muy conocida de todo el alma con Dios*" (xvii, p. 124).

[4] "*Bien entendia que no era del todo union de todas las potentias*" (*Ibid.*).

how nor whence it has come to her" (*Life*, xiv, p. 103). St Teresa compares this mystical sweetness to a delightful unction which enters into the marrow of the soul (*Thoughts on the Cant.*, p. 248). "It is an interior peace which makes the soul so happy that it seems that nothing is wanting to her. To speak wearies her; she desires only to love" (*Letter* to P. Rodr. Alv., p. 32).

46. This peace of soul, this contentment, which is wholly spiritual and has its seat in the will, gushes out over the sensitive part of the soul and there produces very agreeable delights. Sensible sweetness, such is the second element noted by St Teresa, who distinguishes it very clearly from the first. The Lord operates "in the soul by communicating to it a great satisfaction, both *interior* and *exterior*" (*Life*, xiv, p. 103). Very great delights are experienced *in the body*, and a great satisfaction *in the soul*" (*Way of Perf.*, xxxi, p. 144). "It is something which makes itself known chiefly by the *satisfaction and peace* which are introduced *into the soul*, with a great contentment and repose of the powers, and *very agreeable delight*"[1] (*Life*, xv, p. 107).

47. Whence come this profound satisfaction of the soul and these sensible delights? They are the fruit of a very ardent love of God. "This most sweet love of our God enters into the soul, and there exhales a profound satisfaction without making known whence so great a good proceeds" (*Thoughts on the Cant.*, p. 248). "This prayer is a spark of the true love of God; in bestowing it, God wishes to make us understand what this love is" (*Life*, xv, p. 109). "Those amongst you who drink of this water (of contemplation), and those who will some day taste it, will understand how true love . . . rises above and is sovereign over everything earthly and becomes master of all the elements" (*Way*

[1] These sensible sweetnesses are not essential to the mystical state. St Teresa does not explain this explicitly as do St John of the Cross, St Francis de Sales, St Jane de Chantal, but she intends it to be understood, since she gives us to understand that the trial of powerlessness is a mystical state.

of Perf., xix, p. 89). In perfect contemplation the soul "enjoys without knowing how she enjoys, she is on fire with love without knowing how she loves" (*Way of Perf.*, xxv, p. 117). And this love purifies the soul of all her faults (*Way of Perf.*, xix, p. 90).[1]

48. We can only love that which we know; but we can only love imperfectly that which we know badly. Those souls have the greatest love of God, the one being infinitely lovable, who have the deepest knowledge of his loveliness. We have, then, good cause for thinking that in order to be set on fire in this manner the soul has also great need of enlightenment. St Teresa, it is true, insists more strongly on the feelings experienced in the mystical state than on the lights communicated in it. Nevertheless, she has not passed them by unnoticed.

In quietude "the mind sees itself very close to the light and as if clothed in its brilliancy" (*Life*, xv, p. 111). Besides, if feelings are experienced which leave no light in the understanding, these sentiments do not come from God (*ibid.*, p. 112), this is not true quietude.

The Saint lays more emphasis on mystical lights when she describes perfect contemplation, both when she uses this name and when she speaks of mystical theology or sleep or spiritual inebriation.

In mystical theology "the understanding appears to be stunned by the greatness of that which it contemplates; it sees that it is unable to comprehend anything that is represented to it by God" (*Life*, x, p. 69). "The Lord arrests it (in its reasonings). He supplies it with matter wherewith to be occupied and wherewith it may be ravished with joy, so that without any reasoning it then understands more in the short space of a *Credo* than of itself it could possibly understand with all its efforts in many years" (*Life*, xii, p. 88). "The mind remains without reasoning and deliciously occupied with God, like to one who sees and observes so

[1] It destroys sins, not in regard to their punishment but to their guilt. This, indeed, is the effect of every act of perfect charity carried to the point of the detestation of the least fault.

many marvels that one thrusts another out of sight" (*Life*, xvii, p. 126).

In perfect contemplation "the soul understands without any sound of words that the Lord is teaching her" (*Way of Perf.*, xxv, p. 117).

We have not here distinct lights, whose nature can be explained, since St Teresa, as we have seen, repeats again and again that in these states the soul does not understand what is passing within her. She cannot determine what it is that she feels; she knows neither what she enjoys nor how she loves, etc. Does not this agree with the doctrine of the other masters when they teach that mystical lights are indistinct lights, which only give a very sublime idea of the incomprehensible greatness of God, and of his inexplicable loveliness, while at the same time they make known the nothingness of creatures? "Very great truths are communicated to her; she is illuminated by a light whose nature she does not understand, but which makes her see the vanity of the world" (*Cant.* iv, p. 248). And it is not only the nothingness of other creatures, it is her own proper nothingness which the soul then understands: "The Lord, in virtue of the light which he communicates to her, gives her true humility (*Life*, xv, p. 114),[1] greatly superior to any which we can obtain by our own poor reasonings."

[1] The author of an article in the *Revue* (January 5, 1903), speaking of contemplation, praises those who inspire a "dread of those extraordinary states in which the soul is so much exposed to going astray amongst illusions or to *being ruined by pride*." We have mentioned elsewhere (*Vie d'Union*, No. 419) similar assertions of Scaramelli. The saints have a totally different idea of contemplation. Far from maintaining that it should be shunned on account of its dangers, of which they do not speak, they wish that it should be desired for its advantages, of which they are always speaking. Far from believing that contemplation leads to pride, not only St Teresa but St Gregory (*Vie d'Union*, 136), St Lawrence Justinian (*ibid.*, 293), St Alphonsus Rodriguez (*ibid.*, No. 355), St John of the Cross (*Night*, i, 12), affirm (and this may also be deduced from the teaching of other masters) that it leads to humility, and to perfect humility. Besides, this is confirmed by daily experience: never better than in the state of contemplation does a soul comprehend both what is due to God and how far she is from serving him as he ought to be served.

CHAPTER VI

THE NATURE OF THE MYSTICAL STATE ACCORDING TO ST JOHN OF THE CROSS

1. *Clearness of his doctrine.*

49. WHENCE comes this too widespread idea that St John of the Cross is an obscure and almost unintelligible writer?

At the risk of astonishing many of our readers, we assert that of all the mystics, St John of the Cross is clearest and easiest to understand. It is true that to read him with profit—and it is here doubtless that the fault too often lies—it is necessary to have grasped the fundamental points of his doctrine and to be accustomed to his terminology; but once this is achieved his teaching will be found to be very substantial and very helpful. This is proved by the fact that he has always had assiduous readers; we ourselves in our own days know a good number of his fervent disciples, who willingly acknowledge the light and spiritual profit for which they are indebted to him.

Upon the question with which we are now concerned the teaching of St John of the Cross is so precise, he sums up so well and exposes so clearly the doctrine of the other masters, that there ought not, it seems to us, to remain any further doubt as to their perfect agreement one with another.

2. *The loving knowledge of God, an eminent knowledge, received not acquired, is the foundation of the mystical state.*

50. The mystical state begins in what the holy author calls the night of the senses, or purgative contemplation (*Night*, Book I, ch. ii, *et passim*). Here the soul *receives* " an interior and substantial nourishment which is

the beginning of contemplation, obscure, dry, ordinarily concealed from the senses[1] and imperceptible even to him who receives it" (*Night*, Book I, ch. ix, § 7).[2] Here we have the mystical element, it is this obscure contemplation, or, to speak more exactly, that which produces this contemplation, namely, "this general knowledge, confused and loving, which is the medium whereby the soul is united with God" (*Ascent*, III, xxxii, p. 370). Speaking in a general manner of contemplation, he defines it as "the science of love, which is an infused loving knowledge of God" (*Night*, II, ch. xviii, § 5), words which clearly show that he does not admit of acquired contemplation. In the same way, in the *Canticle*, he says: "This delicious science is mystical theology, named by spiritual men contemplation" (Str. xxvii, § 3).

51. It is not only in the *Dark Night* that the great mystical doctor points out this infused element, but in the *Ascent of Carmel* frequent mention is made of it.[3] The Saint, before beginning to speak of contemplation, declares that he is about to write for those "to whom *God has given the grace of placing them in the state of contemplation*" (Book II, vi, § 5, p. 125). Further on (chap. vii) he shows how the knowledge which can be acquired by the use of the intellect, the love which the

[1] Which produces no effect, no sweetness, in the sensible part of the soul.

[2] We indicate the pages according to the critical edition published at Toledo in 1912. We have conformed to this edition also for the enumeration of the chapters, which is different for the *Ascent of Carmel*, Book II, from that found in previous editions. What used to form ch. i is marked as a prologue in the new edition, which is one chapter behind as far as ch. xii of the old editions. Ch. xii and xiii of the old editions are now put together and form ch. xi, and from ch. xiv onwards the old editions are two in advance of the new. (In passages cited from Book II of the *Ascent of Carmel*, references are also given to Lewis's English translation, where the chapters are differently numbered.)

[3] We insist on this point because some writers (*Etudes Carmélitaines*, April, 1920) wish to establish that the contemplation spoken of by St John of the Cross in the *Ascent of Carmel* is an acquired contemplation: this opinion is unacceptable. The texts which we are about to give have doubtless escaped the notice of our contradictor since he passes them over in silence: to us they appear absolutely convincing.

will can procure by its own efforts, do not suffice to produce true union; there must be contemplation, called mystical theology, which is a secret wisdom coming from God, and making God known. "By this loving and confused knowledge," he says elsewhere (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xii, pp. 228-229), "God unites himself to the soul in a degree at once elevated and divine. For in a certain manner this obscure and loving knowledge, which is faith, serves in this present life as a means whereby divine union is effected, just as in the other life the light of glory serves as a means for the clear vision of God."

After having said that by dint of meditating the soul acquires a groundwork of knowledge and love of God which remains in the soul, St John of the Cross says: "*This*" (the groundwork of knowledge and love) "the Lord is also wont to effect without the medium of these acts of meditation—at least without many of them—himself leading souls at once into contemplation and love" (ch. xii, p. 154; L. T., ch. xiv. § 2).

Thus there are two ways of receiving this groundwork of knowledge and love, either by dint of meditating or by receiving them directly from God. Is it then that which is acquired or that which is infused which the Saint has in view when he speaks of that loving knowledge which bestows peace, which calms the soul, *pacifica y sosegada*, which is full of relish—the Saint insists on this point: *sabiduria, sabor*—and which the soul drinks in eagerly just as an infant imbibes milk from the maternal breast? All these characteristics evidently only belong to infused contemplation.

"We will mention here," he adds (Book II, ch. xiv, § 6), "only one reason which shows clearly why this attention to God, this loving and general knowledge of God, are necessary in order that the contemplative soul should abandon meditation and reasoning. It is because if the soul had not this knowledge or sense of the presence of God, she would have nothing and do nothing. Having ceased from meditation, wherein the soul acts discursively, by means of the senses, and not yet having attained to contemplation, which is that general knowledge of which we have spoken, wherein

the spiritual powers of the soul, memory, understanding and will are united (to God) by that knowledge *which is produced in her, received by her, obrada y recibida en ella*, every act of the worship of God must of necessity fail. If there be no kind of activity, the soul not working with her bodily senses in meditation and reflection, and on the other hand, not yet possessing in the spiritual powers that which is *received and produced, recibida y obrada*, which is contemplation, then she is doing nothing, she is in complete idleness." Then the Saint recommends those "who are beginning to enter into this state" to renounce reflection. "By so doing they will enter into the night of the spirit through which they must pass in order to reach a degree of union with God which surpasses human knowledge."

Concerning this knowledge and attention, loving, full of peace, necessary for those who are called to relinquish meditation, the Saint has already said (ch. xi, p. 151; L. T., ch. xiv, § 5), "On first entering into this state, this loving knowledge is scarcely perceptible, because in its beginnings it is wont to be very subtle and delicate, and as it were unfelt." He repeats again in chap. xii that it is subtle and delicate; and he points out that this general knowledge, this *supernatural light*, enters the soul in a manner so pure, so simple, so stripped of forms or intelligible representations, that the understanding is unaware of it and takes no notice of it. From all the evidence we must conclude that it is of infused contemplation that St John of the Cross is speaking; that is the condition which he declares to be necessary before meditation is abandoned.

Those whom "the Lord has begun to lead in the way of this supernatural knowledge of contemplation are the proficients. . . . God communicates himself passively to the soul, just as, to him who has his eyes open and is doing nothing else, light is passively communicated. Thus to receive the light which is supernaturally infused, is to understand passively.[1] . . .

[1] The author to whom we alluded a few pages back, still with the object of proving that St John of the Cross is here intending to

However, it is of her own free will that the soul receives this general and indistinct knowledge of God" (ch. xiii, pp. 163-164). And this light, thus communicated, leaves in the soul effects of which she has no conscious perception, that is to say, an elevation of the spirit which is enlightened concerning heavenly things and an admirable detachment from things and images terrestrial (ch. xii, pp. 159-160; L. T., ch. xiv, § 10).

52. St John of the Cross, who so often speaks of this mystical knowledge, and who represents it as a favour of such great price, always calls it a loving knowledge. Indeed, God does not pour his mystical gifts into the understanding alone. He acts simultaneously on the will, to which he communicates a new kind of love.

"God never communicates wisdom without joining to it love; it is indeed by love that wisdom is diffused" (*Night*, II, xii, § 2, p. 88). "When the spiritual man is unable to meditate, let him learn to remain in loving attention to God, keeping his understanding in repose, though to himself he may seem to be doing nothing. For thus, little by little, and even most rapidly, will the divine tranquillity and peace invade his soul, with admirable and very deep knowledge of God, enveloped in divine love" (*Ascent*, xiii, p. 165; L.T., ch. xv, § 3). In this state (the beginning of contemplation) it is God who acts and the soul which receives, God instructing the soul, and infusing into it in contemplation graces of a very spiritual nature, which are divine knowledge and divine love. The soul sees herself thus filled with this loving knowledge without reflection, without the use of acts, for she can no longer reflect or produce acts as she was wont to do. . . . (*Living Flame*, str. 3, verse 3, par. 5, pp. 445-446; L.T., § 33). "God then communicates to her a loving knowledge or a kind of light whose brightness and warmth[1] are inseparable.

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speak of an acquired contemplation, also quotes ch. xiii, in which the Saint shows that the habit of contemplation is not acquired by a single effort—we shall quote his exact words in par. 55—but he ends his quotation just before the phrase which we have now placed before our readers, a phrase which clearly shows that here, again, there is still question of infused contemplation.

[1] Warmth represents love.

Thus the love of the will has precisely the same qualities as the knowledge of the understanding. Indeed, just as the knowledge is general and obscure, the understanding being unable to arrive at a distinct comprehension of what it has grasped, so also the will loves in a manner general and confused. In so delicate a communication, God, willing that there should be both light and love, acts equally on these two powers, although at times he affects one more deeply than the other. Thus there may sometimes be more knowledge than love, but at other seasons love is more intense than knowledge" (*Living Flame*, str. 3, verse 3, par. 10, p. 455; L.T., § 50). "Sometimes amidst these obscurities the soul becomes illuminated and light shines forth through the darkness, the mystical influence being exerted directly on the intellect while the will remains dry, not experiencing the union of love; but the soul is in a peace and simplicity so subtle and delicate that human language cannot find terms whereby to express them, and the soul then tastes God, sometimes after one manner, sometimes after another. At other moments the understanding and the will are affected simultaneously; then love acts with redoubled force, tenderness and perfection. These two powers are united more perfectly and more delicately according as the purification of the understanding[1] is more complete. But most often, when this complete purification of the understanding has not yet been reached, the kindling touch is felt in the will before perfect knowledge is established in the intellect" (*Night*, II, xii, p. 91; L.T., ch. xiii, § 1).

3. *Mystical theology.*

53. Such is the true traditional doctrine concerning the mystical state; St John of the Cross states it clearly in all the passages in which he explains what the doctors of the Church have understood by mystical theology. "What contemplatives call *mystical theology* or infused

[1] The understanding is purified by being emptied of vain thoughts, of human conceptions, reflections, and all that is the product of its own natural activity.

contemplation," he says, "is an influence of God on the soul which purifies it of its ignorances. . . . Here God is pleased to instruct the soul secretly; . . . it is a loving wisdom of God, which, by purifying and enlightening the soul, prepares it for union" (*Night*, Book II, v, p. 58). "Obscure contemplation is nothing else than the *mystical theology* called by theologians secret wisdom, which, according to St Thomas, is communicated and infused into the soul, more particularly by the way of love" (*Night*, Book II, ch. xvii, p. 105). "The name *mystical theology* or secret wisdom of God is given to that contemplation by which the mind is divinely enlightened and which is hidden even from him who receives it" (*Ascent*, Book II, vii, p. 130; L.T., ch. viii, § 6).

54. In the *Spiritual Canticle* St John of the Cross explains this verse:

There he taught me a science full of sweetness.

"This sweet science," he says, "is *mystical theology*, this secret science of God, which spiritual men call contemplation, a science full of enjoyment because it is a science of all love; love teaches it, love makes it delectable. God himself communicates it, and he communicates it in the love with which he gives himself. It is sweet to the understanding, it is delectable to the will, for it is contained in the love which belongs to the will" (Str. 27, § 3, p. 306).

Elsewhere, explaining this verse:

During the serene night,

he says: "This night is contemplation. The soul gives it the name of night, because contemplation is obscure; for the same reason it is also called *mystical theology*, that is, secret or hidden. In this contemplation, without sound of words, without the help of any feeling, either corporal (sensible) or spiritual, in silence and quiet, unknown to the senses or to nature, God instructs the soul after a manner very secret and very hidden, and the soul itself understands not how she is instructed" (Str. 39, p. 364).

"In the beginning of the spiritual life," says St John of the Cross again, "the effect produced by the fire of divine love is not yet to consume the soul, but rather to dry it and dispose it for kindling; but in course of time, when these flames take hold of it, the soul generally experiences burning ardours of love. And since the understanding has been purified by means of the darkness of the obscure night, it sometimes happens that this *mystical* and loving *theology*, at the same time that it inflames the will, reaches also the intellect and enlightens it by communicating a knowledge and a flame wholly divine" (*Night*, Book II, ch. xii, p. 90; L.T., ch. xii, § 3).

4. *Part played by the soul in mystical contemplation.*

55. St John of the Cross shows no less clearly than St Teresa that in mystical contemplation an important part is left to the soul. Although this latter cannot produce this contemplation by her own labour, still she can interpose obstacles; she can also, on the contrary, dispose herself towards it and assist its exercise. She places obstacles if she has recourse to reflections, making fine considerations, multiplying acts, seeking for emotions or sensible consolations. Instead of agitating herself in such a manner she ought to "close her eyes, not only in her sensitive and inferior part, in which she considers creatures and temporal things, but even in the reasonable and superior part, which has for object God and spiritual things" (*Ascent*, Book II, iii, p. 106; L.T., ch. iv., § 2). "He who aspires to union with God should make no account of his knowledge, nor rest upon his inclinations, sentiments or imagination, but he ought to make an act of faith concerning the divine being, who cannot be grasped either by reason, by the sensitive appetite, by the imagination, by any sentiment.[1] . . ."

"The soul places a great obstacle in the way of the

[1] Notice here the conformity of the teaching of St John of the Cross with the doctrine of Denis expressed in the text we have already quoted in paragraph 15.

acquirement of this sublime state of union when she is attached to some knowledge, some sentiment or imagination, or to her own will. To arrive at this point (union with God) we must renounce ourselves; we must be totally separated from ourselves" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. iii, p. 108; L.T., ch. iv, §§ 3 and 4).

It is not only the exercise of the understanding that the soul must renounce, she must at the same time establish "her will in privation and disengagement from every affection" (*ibid.*, ch. v, p. 116; L.T., ch. vi, § 1).

If, as soon as she has recognised in herself the three signs which denote the presence of mystical graces, the soul, having taken care to place herself in the presence of God, remains in a profound calm, in a holy indifference and in simple attention to God, whom she knows to be present, saying, for example: I believe, I hope, I love; or remaining in these dispositions of faith and love without even formulating them, she is favouring the flow of contemplative graces—that is to say, the effusion of this loving knowledge of God which he has himself begun to pour into her, and which he greatly desires to continue and augment. In course of time, if she is faithful in removing obstacles and disposing herself well, she will by this means be able "to acquire a habit of contemplating which may, in a certain sense, be called perfect. Thereafter, whenever she desires to meditate she will find herself in this knowledge and this peace" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xiii, p. 163; L.T., ch. xv, § 1), which will then be immediately communicated to her. "Before reaching this state, which is that of souls advanced in contemplation, sometimes one degree predominates, sometimes the other, in such a manner that often the soul will find herself plunged in this loving, peaceful attention without working in any way with her powers; often, also, she must help herself gently and moderately to enter into this contemplation by the use of her reason. Then it is time to say that love and knowledge are working and have already worked in the soul, although she herself has done nothing else but keep herself lovingly attentive to God,

neither seeking to feel nor see anything whatever, but being content to let herself be carried by God" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xv, pp. 163-164; L.T., ch. xv, § 1). Here, again, we still have infused contemplation, but God, who only desires to grant it, renders it habitual when the soul knows how to dispose herself thereto.

"In thus disposing herself to receive contemplative graces, the soul is disposing herself for perfection and union with God, of which contemplation is the means. In order to scale the mountain of perfection we must obey the commands given by God to Jacob (Genesis xxxv, 2), that is, reject all strange gods, which are the attachments and affections of the soul, purify ourselves by means of the night of the senses from all the stains left behind by these attachments, by renouncing and regretting them; lastly, we must change our garments. But if the first two conditions are fulfilled, God himself will replace the old garments by new ones, placing in the soul, instead of the old manner of conceiving, a new knowledge of himself drawn from himself, and a new love, by which the soul will love God in God.[1] . . . God thus brings to nothing everything which belongs to the old man; natural forces no longer act, the soul is clothed with a new and wholly supernatural strength in all her faculties, so that, instead of acting in a human manner, she acts divinely; this is the goal which may be reached in the state of union" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. v, § 6, pp. 54-55). "That which disposes the soul to union is neither conceptions, tastes, senses, nor imaginations which are produced in a natural manner, but purity and love, that is to say, nakedness and perfect renunciation before God alone. There can be no perfect transformation where there is not perfect purity; the illumination of the soul and its union with God will be proportionate to that purity" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. iv, p. 114; L.T., ch. v, § 8).

[1] Once again, how can it be said that all through this book of the *Ascent of Carmel* the Saint is only speaking of an acquired contemplation?

5. *Mystical union is the perfect exercise of faith, hope, and charity.*

56. This mystical knowledge never departs from the order of faith;[1] it is founded on the truths known by faith: the greatness, perfections, amiability, incomprehensibility of God. Still more, the act of contemplation is of all the acts of faith the most pure and the most perfect; it does not dwell upon considerations, it sets aside feelings and sensible emotions, on which faith often rests, but which are not in themselves faith; it consists uniquely in an act of adherence to the truths proposed, an act of adherence made with a new light in the understanding, and a constancy, an admirable intensity of will. It is easy to understand that a faith so elevated, causing also so firm an adherence to the truths which God himself contemplates from all eternity, to truths which are God himself, will unite us intimately with God. Besides, as we have seen, the Saint tells us that faith serves as means to the divine union, and elsewhere: "the greater faith a soul has, the more closely is she united to God" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. viii, p. 132; L.T., ch. ix, § 1).

"The soul, in order to advance in the night (active) of sense and to strip herself of all that is sensible, must have been aided (in the beginnings of the spiritual life) by the vehement desires of sensible love. But in order that tranquillity may reign in the superior part of the soul, she must now concentrate and fix her faculties, her tastes and spiritual appetites in faith" (*Ascent*, Book II, p. 98).

57. Hope is also exercised more perfectly in the mystical state for this reason, that the soul, being emptied of the remembrance of created things, does not oppose any hindrance to the action of mystical grace which makes her aspire to celestial goods, to God who will be her eternal reward. "The more the memory is denuded (of the images and memories which usually fill

[1] On the contrary, visions and revelations are outside the order of faith, for they have not for object the truths which the Church proposes to our faith.

it), the greater is its hope; the greater its hope, the more intimate its union with God" (*Ascent*, Book III, ch. vi, § 3, p. 290).

58. Finally, contemplative love, even though it is a gift of God and not the fruit of the soul's efforts, is none the less an act of the virtue of charity, and even its most perfect act. If it is God himself who instigates this motion of love, the soul, who has had no need to arouse her love, or, at least, if she has aroused it herself, finds herself enkindled with a kind of love which of herself she could never have acquired, freely consents to this infused love, and has all the merit of it. Now, that which produces union is love; love tends essentially to union; this most sublime love then produces a very close union with God. "The soul is united to God in her understanding by faith; in her memory by hope; and in her will by love. . . . The spiritual powers ought—by the exercise of these three acts—to empty themselves of all that is not God, and to keep themselves in the obscurities thus produced by the theological virtues which are the means and the disposition for the union of the soul with God" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. v, p. 117; L.T., ch. vi, § 1). "As love is the union of the Father and the Son, so is it the bond of union between the soul and God" (*Canticle*, str. 13, § 14, p. 231).

6. *The transformation of the soul into God is the work of mystical union.*

59. St. John of the Cross—and in this again his doctrine is in complete conformity with that of the other masters—often joins together and identifies union and the transformation of the soul in God, or again the perfect resemblance of the soul with God. "When we speak of the union of the soul with God, it is not of that substantial union whereby God is always present in all his creatures of which we speak, but rather of the union and transformation of the soul into God *by love*, which cannot take place before there is a resemblance of love between them; this is why we call it a union of

resemblance. . . . The soul must cast from her all that is not conformed to, all that does not resemble God, in order that she may receive his divine resemblance." . . . If this resemblance is lacking " she will not receive a new birth in the Holy Spirit, she cannot possess the Kingdom of God, which is the state of perfection. Perfectly to be regenerated in the Holy Spirit in this life is to become like to God by a purity which admits of no mixture of imperfection, and then takes place perfect transformation, not by union of essence but by union of participation" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. iv. pp. 112-113; L.T., ch. v, § 5'.

60. This union which takes place in the mystical state, by the perfect exercise of the three theological virtues, how is it a union of transformation or resemblance?

The contemplative lives in God much more perfectly than one who has not entered into the mystic state. The latter attains to God less directly, using for this purpose his imagination, considerations, and resting on sensible emotions. The contemplative, on the contrary, goes straight to God; God is the immediate object, and is very frequently the object of his thoughts, his hopes, his love. Thanks to his pure and enlightened faith, he thinks of God; by his ardent hope, he tends to God; by his intense love he reposes in God. But to think of God, to tend to God, to repose in God, this is the intimate life of God, who unceasingly contemplates himself and who takes in himself his infinite complacency. This it is which produces in the bosom of the Blessed Trinity the eternal generation of the word, the eternal " spiration " of the Holy Spirit. Mystical life is then the most perfect resemblance to the divine life; it is also the most perfect possession of God to which we can attain here below; lastly, as, in order to produce this mystical life there is need of a most special action and consequently a very intimate presence[1] of

[1] *Tanto alicui naturae perfectius unitur Deus*, says St Thomas (opusc. *ad cant. Antioch.*), *quanto in eam magis suam virtutem exercet:* God is more closely united to a creature the greater things he operates in it. For God, indeed, to be present in any place is to act there, and it is for this reason that the degrees of the presence of God are established according to the degrees of his operation.

God, it is truly the union and transformation of the soul in God.

7. *The mystical state is an eminent grace, but not an extraordinary favour.*

61. From this we see that *the mystical state, or mystical union, is not, in the eyes of St John of the Cross, an exceptional privilege, being only*, as so many modern authors have claimed, *distantly related to perfection.* On the contrary, it is the MOST PERFECT EXERCISE OF THE THREE THEOLOGICAL VIRTUES. For the perfect practice of these great virtues the efforts of the faithful soul, aided by common grace, are not sufficient, eminent graces are necessary in which the soul is more passive than active. Like St Teresa, St John of the Cross calls the mystical knowledge of God *supernatural* (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. ix, p. 135, ch. x, § 2). It is supernatural in this sense that the understanding, even in a soul in a state of grace, cannot acquire it by her own efforts and reflections: "*todo aquello que se da al entendimiento sobre su capacidad y habilidad natural.*" The holy author calls "natural" the considerations of meditation (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xi, p. 146; L.T., ch. xii, § 4), which are, however, supernatural in the modern sense of the word, being produced under the action of faith.[1] "In this state, the action of the powers ceases . . . the light and sweetness of love are diffused in the soul without any action on her part. . . . God communicates himself passively to the soul as material light is communicated to him who has his eyes open" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xiii, p. 164; L.T., ch. xv, § 1).

62. If this is an eminent grace, it is by no means, in the eyes of the holy doctor, an extraordinary favour:

[1] It is thus that Blessed Albert the Great, whose doctrine presents such striking resemblances with that of St John of the Cross, also names mystical light, supernatural, and natural, the other modes of knowledge; see *Vie d'Union*, par. 204, where we have translated *modos visionis naturalis* by ordinary modes of knowledge; the word *natural* being now employed to signify that which is done without the help of grace would have seemed to us a mistranslation.

the favours which he calls extraordinary[1] (*ibid.*, Book II, ch. xi, p. 139), and which he would have the soul neither desire nor ask, are things which may be added to the mystical state, such as visions, revelations, etc., but which are of a very different nature. The mystical state, on the contrary, being the state of contemplation and union with God, ought to be the object of the aspirations of the fervent soul, and God only asks to bestow them on her. "This light *which raises the soul to the state of perfection*," says the Saint, "is always ready to shed its beams in the soul. . . . Remove the obstacles, take away the veils, and immediately your soul, simplified and purified by this spiritual denudation, will be transformed into the purity and simplicity of the divine wisdom which is the word of God. In the measure in which the soul, on fire with divine love, is stripped of the natural element" —by renunciation and recollection—"the divine element is diffused in her naturally[2] and supernaturally, in order that there may be no void in nature" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xiii, p. 165; L.T., ch. xv, § 2).

[1] The Saint carefully distinguishes from these spiritual graces, which are the basis of the mystic state, and which contribute directly towards perfection, the gratuitous gifts, *gratiae gratis datae*, whose object is the profit of our neighbour. Both St Teresa and St John of the Cross reserve the word "extraordinary" to visions. Mystical contemplation is not in their eyes an extraordinary thing.

[2] By "naturally" is here meant "normally." The sense is then: the soul being emptied of what is natural, it is natural that she should be filled with the supernatural.

CHAPTER VII

THE NATURE OF THE CONTEMPLATIVE STATE ACCORDING TO SUAREZ

63. The doctrine of St John of the Cross is as clear as possible; there seems to be nothing to add to it, and the question we are seeking to solve—"what are the elements constituting the mystical state"—seems to be already decided.

However, it appears advisable to set forth the teaching of yet one more great master, who is both an illustrious theologian and an experienced mystic. Suarez, in his very remarkable treatise on prayer, teaches the same doctrine under a different form. Let us see what he says.

64. Three gifts of the Holy Spirit concur in producing contemplation, the gifts of understanding, wisdom and knowledge. By the gift of understanding the *things of faith are conceived after a more elevated manner than could take place by reasoning alone, or by the natural power of knowing.* This is the function proper to the gift of understanding. Now, the more profoundly a truth is penetrated, the more easily do we remain spellbound in admiration before it. Further, these truths, these things of faith, being, *by means of a special motion of the Holy Spirit,* better understood, they appear more divine, and more worthy of our belief, while they procure a greater enjoyment to the soul which gives herself to their consideration.

As to the gifts of wisdom and knowledge, they render these same truths more delectable, more capable of acting on the will. Knowledge does this by reasons of an inferior order, wisdom by reasons of a more elevated kind, and especially by means of that sympathy, that attraction towards divine things which makes the soul find such a relish in them (*De Oratione*, ch. x, 9).

65. There is no doubt as to how Suarez regards the

gifts of the Holy Spirit. Following the Fathers, he places them among the most supernatural graces, specially infused by the Holy Spirit. "*Aperte numerant (Patres) haec dona inter gratias maxime supernaturales et a Spiritu Sancto specialiter infusas*" (*De Gratia*, Book II, ch. xxi, n. 4). According to him, "to the gift of understanding must be attributed all there can be of lively penetration, of acuteness, if one may speak thus, in the supernatural perception of the things of faith. *Pertinet ad hunc intellectum quidquid acuminis, ut sic dicam, supernaturalis intelligentiae in concipiendis rebus fidei intervenire potest*" (*ibid.*, ch. xix, n. 8). It appears certain, says Suarez again, that the human spirit, even endowed with faith, cannot always suffice by its natural light to grasp, to confirm, to explain the things of faith in such a manner as the faithful are seen to do; very often, in order to this, a particular and supernatural aid from the Holy Spirit is needed, which is effected by the acts of the gift of understanding. It is more in conformity with the teaching of Holy Scripture and of the saints to believe them to be, in themselves and substantially, supernatural, "*for this penetration of divine mysteries . . . surpasses the powers of the human mind.* Besides, experience confirms this doctrine: do we not sometimes find the ignorant and the simple possessed of a *deeper conception* of and better able to explain the mysteries of the faith than the learned?"

66. Suarez also attributes to a very special movement of the Holy Spirit the pleasure which the soul takes in the objects of her contemplation, and which is in truth the effect of the gift of wisdom (*De Gratia*, Book II, ch. xix, No. 11). He quotes to this effect the saying of Albert the Great that the gift of wisdom is a certain light by which divine things are known and tasted by experience. He quotes also Richard of St Victor that it is an act of the gift of wisdom to contemplate God by love, with a certain experimental enjoyment which has its seat in the faculty of loving.

67. It is then by lights, and by a love surpassing human efforts, and communicated by a very special

operation of the Holy Spirit, that the learned theologian explains the nature of the mystical or contemplative state. For him, the mystical state is the fruit of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. As in the writings of others, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are eminent graces, not exceptional favours, which, to be developed and exercised habitually, only need a heart entirely docile to the divine inspirations, which is the case in perfect souls. Suarez is entirely logical when he presents the unitive or contemplative way, not as something extraordinary, but as the common way of perfect souls.

68. Suarez (*De Orat.*, xi) indicates as the objects of contemplation the truths of the faith, *divine things*, without particularising further. Elsewhere, explaining the famous passage of Denis, so often quoted by the masters, he says that it is in the thought of the incomprehensible greatness of God, known rather by negations than by affirmations, that the contemplative soul, according to Denis, should find its repose. "*Vult ergo quod mens* quiescat in cogitatione cujusdam eminentiae ineffabilis *quae per negationes potius quam per affirmationes concipienda est*" (*ibid.*, xiii, 28).

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION. MYSTICAL UNION: HOW IS IT TO BE RECOGNISED?

69. The teaching of the mystical doctors, of those who speak with authority, leaves no doubt as to their meaning, and from the evidence we have given, we may formulate this proposition.

In the mystical state, and in every mystical state there is this double element: a superior knowledge of God, which, although general and confused,[1] gives a very high idea of his incomprehensible greatness; secondly, an unreasoning but very precious[2] love which God himself communicates, and to which the soul, in spite of all its efforts, could never raise itself.

70. Certain mystics have emphasised the second element, this intense love which, not being produced by the considerations of the reason, does not seem to rest on any specific motive. In truth, in the mystical state God is loved; the soul melts, flows out in love and very frequently without being able to say why. It is this exercise of love which chiefly arrests our attention. If in describing the mystical state the words "union of love" had been used rather than that of "contemplation"—these two words, "union" and "contemplation," have been in use since the first centuries of our era—perhaps its nature would have been better understood. However this may be, those who have experience of mystical states insist more on the infused

[1] Let us here say, to avoid any erroneous interpretation of our meaning, that by this confused knowledge we in no way understand a vague *representation* of badly defined forms, or again of a Being penetrating and enveloping our own being; these are products of the imagination which may sometimes accompany but do not constitute the mystical element. The latter is an *intellectual* perception of a Being who is understood to be indefinable and unattainable by the reason; according to the saying of Venerable John of St Samson, it is "God ineffably perceived."

[2] This love may be very calm, not sensible, scarcely perceived.

love than on the lights which the soul receives therein; some authors have even asked whether the understanding acts at all in the mystical state, or have taught that the will alone is brought into play.[1] These writers have not been followed, and with good reason, for love always supposes knowledge; mystical love has for object a Being whose grandeur and charm[2] are grasped confusedly but very vividly; otherwise he would not be loved, or would be loved with a much less intense love.[3]

71. These principles being laid down, it is easy to show in what mystical union consists.

According to St Thomas and the theologians, there are three kinds of union possible between God and man,[4] for there are three manners in which the presence of God in a soul is possible. God is in all beings by his presence, by his power, and by his essence. He is in them in quality of agent, for it is he who by his

[1] *Cf.* Suarez, who refutes them, *De Oratione,* ch. xiii.

[2] This mystical phenomenon has been very well explained by St Alphonsus Liguori (*Praxis conf.*, 135). We have given the passage in the *Degrees,* Book V, Part I, ch. iv, sect. 3, No. 37.

[3] A contemporary author, to whose learning we are glad to pay homage, Père Arintero, O.P. (*Cuestiones misticas,* p. 488), reproaches us with having too much restricted the mystical state in declaring that the lights of faith and of infused love are its essential elements. He prefers to comprehend under the term "mystical" all that takes place in a manner superior to the human mode —in one word, all that is the gift of the Holy Spirit; and he understands by "ascetical" all that takes place outside the gifts and by the aid of reason.

Certainly, it would not be contrary either to logic or theology thus to understand the distinction between the ascetic and the mystic, but it does not seem to us to be quite conformable to traditional teaching, the mysterious knowledge of God and the infused love which accompanies it having always been regarded as the essential elements of the mystic state. Besides, these elements are more often met with than the learned and pious Dominican appears to believe, for in these infused dispositions of piety, filial fear, admiration, respect, adoration, joy, praise, which he points out as not being included in our definition of the mystical state, there are present certainly infused lights and love. But there may be, for example, certain practical lights having their source in the gift of counsel, certain acts of the gift of fortitude, which are not mystical states, although communicated according to a superhuman manner.

[4] *Sent.*, lib. I, dist. 37, Q. 1, a. 2.

almighty power keeps them in existence and communicates life to them. He is in the just soul by his grace, as the object of knowledge and love.[1] Lastly, he can be present in a soul by a personal or hypostatic union, which was realised in our divine Lord.

Evidently mystical union is not the fruit of that presence of God which is common to all beings; it is certainly not hypostatic union; it belongs then to the second mode of presence, which is realised by sanctifying grace and which supposes knowledge and love. It is, indeed, the constant doctrine of St Thomas that we are united to God by acts of the understanding and will, which render us like to him.[2] *Gratia conjungit nos Deo per modum assimilationis, sed requiritur ut uniamur ei per operationes intellectus et voluntatis* (*Q. unica de Charit.*, a. 2). *Unio nostra ad Deum est per operationem, inquantum scilicet eum cognoscimus et amamus . . . talis unio est per gratiam habitualem* (3, Q. 6, a. 6, ad 1). Explaining the famous saying of Denis, *patiens divina*, οὐ μονον μάθων ἀλλα και πάθων θεια, a saying often repeated by doctors and saints as describing the mystical state, St Thomas again says: *Passio divinorum ibi dicitur affectio ad divina et conjunctio ad ipsa per amorem* (I-II, Q. 22, a. 3, ad 1): To suffer divine things signifies to experience a loving inclination to divine things and to be united to them by love.[3] (*Cf.*

[1] *Deus dicitur esse in re aliqua dupliciter: uno modo per modum causae agentis, et sic est in omnibus rebus . . . alio modo sicut objectum operationis est in operante . . . secundum quod cognitum est in cognoscente et desideratum in desiderante. . . . . Et quia hoc habet rationalis creatura per gratiam, dicitur esse in hoc modo in sanctis per gratiam. . . . . Nulla alia perfectio superaddita substantiae facit Deum esse in aliquo sicut objectum cognitum et amatum, nisi gratia, et ideo sola gratia facit singularem modum essendi Deum in rebus. Est autem alius singularis modus essendi Deum in homine per unionem* (*hypostaticam*) (I, Q. 8, a. 3, et ad 4).

[2] It will be remarked how well this doctrine of St Thomas harmonises with that of St John of the Cross, who makes divine union consist in very perfect acts of faith, hope, and love. Besides, St Thomas himself says: *Virtutes theologicae sunt quibus mens humana Deo conjungitur* (I-II, Q. 68, a. 8; *cf.* I-II, Q. 28, a. 1).

[3] All those who have personal experience of mystical states understand, like St Thomas, that the divine thing which the soul feels, which is operated in her, is nothing else than love: ardours of love,

De verit, Q. 26, a. 3, ad 18 and II-II, Q. 97, a. 2, ad 2). In the same way we are drawn towards God the First Truth and Supreme Being, we reach him in himself,[1] we possess him, we enjoy him, which can only be done by knowing him and loving him (Lect. 2 in cap. 2, *Epist. ad Col.*); this possession and this enjoyment of God is the germ of the perfect possession and consummated enjoyment in which our eternal felicity will consist.

Inasmuch as the knowledge of God is acquired by the ordinary process of reasoning, enlightened by faith; in so far as the acts of love are the result of the knowledge thus acquired and the product of the efforts by which the soul excites herself to love, union is only obtained by means of that grace which is found in all the just. It is "actual" union when the just soul makes acts of faith and love; it is "habitual" union when she possesses this virtue even in germ—as in children not yet come to the age of reason—without producing its acts. But when the soul obtains that mysterious knowledge of God which is not engendered by acts of the reason, and that new love, no less mysterious, which is produced by the direct action of God on the affective faculty, then her union is much more perfect. This is the secret or mystic union, symbolised by the kiss of the divine Spouse, the union so justly desired by fervent souls. "The spouse, who in all her pursuits only desires to be united with her well-beloved; let him kiss me, she says, with a kiss of his mouth, as if she cried out: 'Will so many sighs and burning desires which my love incessantly pours never obtain what my soul desires? I run; alas! shall I never obtain the prize for which I strive, which is to be united

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or sweetness of love, or languors of love. To be convinced of this it would suffice to read, amongst many others, the passages quoted below (Appendix II), in which the great masters explain the manner in which they feel the experimental knowledge of God and the sentiment of his presence. (Appendix II is not included in this present translation.—Note of translator.)

[1] *Secundo creatura attingit ad ipsum Deum secundum substantiam suam consideratum . . . et hoc est per operationem, scilicet quando aliquis fide adhaeret primae veritati, et charitate ipsi summae bonitati* (*Sent., loc cit.*; *cf.* 1, Q. 43 ad 3).

heart to heart, spirit to spirit, with my God, my Spouse and my life? When will it be that I shall pour my soul into his heart, and that he shall place his heart in my soul, that thus happily united we may live inseparable?' "[1]

72. The mystical element, having its seat (to use the traditional word) in the summit of the soul, is an insensible element: it is particularly recognised by its effects. St John of the Cross indicates three effects (*Ascent*, ch. xi, p. 150) by which, in the first stages, its presence may be known; repugnance to considerations, a habitual renunciation which hinders the imagination from dwelling on profane objects, and lastly the sense of well-being which the soul experiences in being alone with God. St Jane de Chantal gives her daughters the same three tokens by which they may "recognise if their repose and quietude in prayer come from God. . . . The first will be if, taking your subject of meditation as usual, you are not able to make use of it, but without any artifice on your part you find your heart, your spirit, and the intimate depths of your soul attracted to this holy repose." The Saint adds other signs which all amount to progress in virtue; progress in obedience, in detachment, in submission to the divine will, in love of suffering and in humility.[2]

"I desire," says St Teresa, "with our Lord's help to explain clearly the effects produced by this supernatural prayer, in order that you may understand *from its effects* that it is the divine Spirit who is acting."[3] Then she explains how, by this heavenly water, the garden of the soul is fertilised, the flowers and fruits, symbols of true virtue, begin to make their appearance.

[1] St Francis de Sales, *Love of God*, Book I, ch. ix.

The incontestable doctrine of the masters, let us again repeat, is, as St Francis de Sales here shows, that mystical union is a union of faith and love; it is impossible to explain otherwise what they say of this most desirable union. If any of our readers still have the least doubt about it, let them convince themselves by reading, in the *Vie d'Union*, the passages in which it is shown that contemplation is the result of eminent graces of light and love, and also those in which contemplation is depicted as the union of the soul with God. (See analytical table at the end of that work.)

[2] Her *Life*, by Mgr. Bougaud, ch. xviii.

[3] *Life*, xiv, p. 104.

"It is by its effects and by the good works it produces," she says in another work, "that true graces of prayer are recognised" (*Fourth Mansion*, ch. ii). "There is no better sign"—than the total gift of oneself to God—"by which to recognise whether our prayer will progress to the state of union, or whether it will never reach so far" (*Fifth Mansion*, ch. i).

To those on whom he confers this favour (of giving them the kiss of contemplation) our Lord gives clear tokens of his action. One is to despise all earthly things, esteeming them at their proper value; not seeking our own good, because we understand its worthlessness; finding pleasure only in the company of those who love their God; having a distaste for this life; only having that esteem for riches which they merit; and other similar dispositions which he himself teaches to those whom he has brought into this state (*Thoughts on the Love of God*, ch. iii, p. 240).

"Lest anyone should misunderstand his own state," says St Laurence Justinian, "we will give the signs by which may be recognised with certainty, true contemplation and the divine tastes which are found in that interior practice. We are enjoying true contemplation if we are prudent in our conduct, if we know how to recollect our thoughts, to put before ourselves a right intention in our actions, to apply ourselves to spiritual studies, to desire the presence of God, to love him with a love full of humility, to rejoice above all things in intercourse with him, if we are inflamed with ardour for celestial goods, and if we enjoy a profound peace."[1]

Several among the masters also include the desire of heaven among the marks of true contemplation.[2]

[1] *The Solitary Life*, ch. i.

[2] See *Vie d'Union*, No. 210. To the other authors quoted in that place we may also add St Teresa, who often returns to this effect of true contemplation (*Life*, ch. xxvi, p. 203; *Way*, ch. xix, pp. 88, 91, 92; ch. xlii, p. 204; and in the *Thoughts on the Canticle* the passage already quoted). Besides, St Thomas, speaking of the dispositions of perfect souls, describes them as tending principally to union with God here below, and desirous of quitting this life to be with Christ (II-II, Q. 24, a. 9, c.).

Thus the saints see a close connection between the mystical state and the perfect practice of the virtues; one will not exist without the other. It is certain that these different effects are more trustworthy signs than those which some contemporary authors would substitute for them. Do they not prove that the soul has obtained great lights and that it is raised to a perfect love; that she has consequently received that intimate illumination and that intense charity which surpass human efforts, and which God himself pours into generous and faithful souls?

CHAPTER IX

THE ELEMENTS WHICH ALONE CONSTITUTE THE MYSTIC STATE

1. *The elements indicated are sufficient to constitute the mystic state.*

73. That the elements we have pointed out are found in the mystic state will be acknowledged by everyone; that they are the fundamental and distinctive elements of that state we think it hardly possible to contest; but may not some think that side by side with these lights and this mystical love there exists another element, not less essential, not less fundamental? Certain authors have scarcely mentioned the double element of which we speak; they have sought elsewhere for the characteristic note of the mystical state; whether they are not right, at least in part, is what we have now to examine.

First of all and *a priori* we may say: if in the mystical state other elements than these are met with, they cannot form its essential and fundamental element; for the mystical state certainly exists without them. By this fact alone, that the soul has received the contemplative illumination in her intellect and the infused love in her will, she is no longer in the same state as before. She possesses a new manner of knowing God, a knowledge very superior to speculative knowledge; remaining constantly united to God by an enduring and pure love which her previous efforts have never been able to procure for her, she has become one of our Lord's special friends. This new state, so different from the common way,[1] so precious for the soul, merits a title of its own.

[1] It is true that among many who have no personal experience of similar states this difference is not perceived, or scarcely taken into account. They attach no importance to whether these lights come from the acts of the reason or whether they are the fruit of a direct operation of the Holy Spirit; whether this love is active or passive.

It has been called "gnosis," mystical theology, contemplation, unitive way, passive state. In our own day it is usually denominated "mystical state."

74. As to other phenomena, which certain authors have put forth as the distinctive elements of the mystical state, they have no necessary connection with it. With regard to the different opinions which we shall discuss later on, cannot God communicate contemplative lights and unitive love without reducing the powers of the soul to impotence, without making the presence of sanctifying grace visible, without causing sweetness and delight, without making his contact perceptible? It is sufficient that he act on the understanding and on the will. In comparison with this action of God on the understanding and the will, *by means of which the soul becomes capable of very sublime and very meritorious acts*, such as acts of faith, hope, and love which unite her to God in an admirable manner, how much less important will seem the binding of the powers, the sweetnesses and consolations *which do not increase merit in the soul, nor in any way augment the theological virtues, nor produce divine union.*

But let us consider in detail the opinions we have mentioned, and examine into their probability.

2. *Elements added by some authors: ligature, consciousness of the state of grace.*

75. Bossuet says: "One of the characteristics of the mystical way is powerlessness to make acts, at least those which are discursive . . . the power of making them is totally lacking." He also teaches that "the signal necessary for passing to the contemplative state is the *absolute* impossibility of discourse."[1] He calls this phenomenon the *ligature of the powers*.[2] We do

They do not understand the value of infused graces, and are therefore obliged to seek for other distinctions, which must, they imagine, be altogether extraordinary.

[1] *Instruction on the States of Prayer*, Book VII.

[2] Further on we will quote passages from St Teresa and St John of the Cross clearly explaining the difficulty which the contemplative finds in meditating, and showing how far this difficulty goes (Appendix I, No. 209).

not think that this opinion has many partisans at the present day, it is too manifestly opposed to what the Saints tell us of the co-existence in the soul of the mystical state and distractions. St Teresa in particular insists strongly on this point,[1] and St John of the Cross is no less decided.[2] Both Saints address themselves frequently and in strong terms to those who, being in the mystic state, leave it in order to make discursive acts. Thus such acts are not then impossible. It seems waste of time to discuss further this assertion of Bossuet.

76. Must we see in the mystic state a consciousness of the union existing by sanctifying grace between God and the soul? "The divine life," says a contemporary author, "communicated to our souls (by grace) is hidden as a rule, as long as the trial endures, from our consciousness. . . . One day the veils will fall; God will appear to us united to our souls, inundating them with his light, penetrating them with his life. . . . This will be the light of glory. . . . Between the obscurity of faith and the light of glory are placed the enjoyments of mystical union. Without entirely unveiling himself, God can give to the soul to which he unites himself a more or less vivid feeling of this encounter, in such sort that the soul will not only believe by the adherence of faith in the communication of divine life which brings her grace, but *will see, will feel, will taste* the ineffable union which is accomplished between her God and her" (Ribet, *Mystique divine*, Part I, ch. xviii).

Here, we must confess, is a novel opinion, in favour of which, besides, no authority is alleged, because, indeed, *none of the masters have given any such explanation.* The presence of sanctifying grace is a fact which escapes the knowledge of him who possesses it; he can divine it *by the effects* which it produces, but how can he recognise it in itself? He cannot *feel* grace, which is a purely spiritual phenomenon, and conse-

[1] *Life,* ch. xv, pp. 107, 110, 111; ch. xvii, pp. 125, 126. *Castle, Fourth Mansion,* ch. i, pp. 49, 51; ch. iii, p. 64. *Way,* ch. xxxi, pp. 145, 146, 147.

[2] *Ascent,* Book II, ch. xi, p. 150; ch. xii, p. 155.

quently insensible; he cannot *see* his soul except by an altogether extraordinary privilege. This would be a purely intellectual vision, which is one of the most rare favours which God gives even to the Saints themselves. This explanation seems to run no chance of being adopted.

3. *Joy and consolations are not essential to the mystic state.*

77. Reference is often made, in descriptions of mystical states, to the joys, so delicate and so profound, which are tasted therein. Are not these spiritual sweetnesses necessarily met with in every mystical state? Do they not form, for that very reason, one of its essential elements? Several authors seem to think so, for they bring these joys into their definition of the mystic state. This again cannot, we think, be sustained. If there are mystic joys, there are also mystic trials; if, in the mystic state, there are ineffable consolations, there are also terrible sufferings. Nothing occurs more frequently in the lives and writings of the Saints than the description of these interior pains, which cannot be understood by souls less enlightened and less loving.

St John of the Cross has devoted long pages to depicting these trials. Let us quote only this one passage, wherein he explains how contemplative lights, which to him, as we have seen, form the fundamental element of the mystic state, can cause such intense sufferings:

"This light of contemplation, so sweet and agreeable to the soul that nothing is more worthy of her desires, how is it that when first it strikes the soul its effects are so painful? For this is the same light by which union is effected, and in it the soul will find, in the state of perfection, all desirable things. This comes from the weakness and imperfection which still cling to her, and from her own dispositions, which hinder the reception of the divine sweetnesses. So, when the divine light is shed on the soul, she must of necessity suffer" (*Dark Night*, Book II, ch. ix, § 13, p. 80).

Beyond this, the sight of the grandeurs of God gives the soul a knowledge of her own misery which crushes her: "The abyss of the majesty and of the divine greatness discover to the soul another abyss, that of her own poverty and misery" (*ibid.*, Book II, ch. vi, p. 63).

It is also because he is more enlightened concerning the grandeurs, the goodness, the divine sanctity and loveliness that the contemplative feels more deeply both the grievousness of his former faults and the severity of the divine judgements; the evils of this present life and the pain of his earthly exile. These are, indeed, the four kinds of sufferings enumerated by St Gregory the Great, which, he says, sometimes pierce the soul of the contemplative.[1]

Thus there is no possible misconception—enjoyment is not an essential element of the mystical state.

4. *The sentiment of the presence of God is not essential to the mystical state.*

78. Frequently, the contemplative soul is conscious that God is within her; it may be on a sudden, or again in the course of her prayer, she is seized with this thought: God is within me. This thought strikes her so vividly that she cannot possibly doubt its truth: *I feel my God*,[2] she will say; he is truly in my heart, in the most intimate centre of my being. She sees most clearly that by a divine favour she has entered into a new state; her own reflections have not led her to this conviction that God is within her. Yet, again, it is not the consideration of such truths as these: God is everywhere; God has said that he dwells in those who love him. No, her conviction of the presence of God within her does not rest on motives of this kind; it is much more vivid, and quite different from any she could obtain by recourse to these considerations.

79. Assuredly, it is a mystical phenomenon which we

[1] See *Vie d'Union*, No. 123.

[2] St John of the Cross had heard this expression (*supra*, No. 1), but, as we have seen, he was far from deducing from it a divine contact.

have just described. Some contemporary authors have claimed that it constitutes the essence of the mystical state, that whenever this sentiment is not experienced we are only in an ascetic state, that is, a state to which we can raise ourselves by our own reflections and efforts.

First of all, let us remark that these authors either neglect to explain the nature of this sentiment of the presence of God (see article *Mysticisme* in the *Dictionnaire apologétique*), or else give a manifestly erroneous explanation of it. The doctors and the Saints are all of one mind in attributing this sentiment to the effects of grace, which the soul recognises in herself, and which make her say: "God is within me, penetrating my soul and filling it with light," and to lights also placed in the soul by God, which assure her of the same truth. This sentiment must then be explained by these infused graces of light and love, which we have shown to be characteristic of the mystical state.

But is this sentiment of the presence of God in the soul really essential? If it is not met with in every mystic state, it cannot be described as the distinctive note, just as, according to the remark of a recent author, we cannot define man as an animal with a white skin, because there are negroes, yellow men and redskins.

Some examples will prove that there are states in which this sentiment does not exist, and which cannot be declared to be ascetic, that is, according to the notion of the ascetic state admitted by all, obtained by the aid of reflection and the efforts of the soul.

A person in adoration near the altar may have made laudable efforts to place himself in the presence of his God; he may have said and repeated for some time: "Jesus is there, close to me," without becoming inwardly penetrated by this thought. When lo! suddenly and without knowing how, he feels himself in its grasp. This truth, which he believed, but which did not impress him sensibly, now seems to him most clear, and at the same time he is drawn forcibly by a loving attraction towards this God so good and desirable. Here, again, he recognises that something new has

taken place within him, that grace has taken him much further than his own efforts; that he has obtained an illumination in his mind and an enkindling in his will which are a gift of God; he is in the mystical state, yet he does not think of the presence of God within him.

80. St Francis de Sales, speaking of mystical recollection, says also as clearly as possible: "This sweet recollection . . . does not take place only by the sentiment of the divine presence in the midst of our heart, for in whatever manner it may be that we place ourselves in his sacred presence . . . at the simple presence of God, at the simple sentiment we experience of his regard . . . ALTHOUGH AT THE SAME TIME WE DO NOT THINK OF THE OTHER MANNER OF PRESENCE BY WHICH HE IS WITHIN US, our powers and faculties are collected and assembled within us out of reverence for his divine majesty, whom love causes us to fear with a fear of love and respect" (*Love of God*, Book II, ch. vii).

81. Mystical lights often bear upon the grandeurs of God considered in himself without reference to his presence in us. The soul, then, instead of turning back upon herself, is attracted towards him, thirsts to be united to him. Forgetting all else, and seeing only her God, she desires to cast herself upon him, to lose herself in him. This is the flight, the mystic transport so often described by the masters under the name of *excessus, excessus mentalis*. In such a state her thought does not bear upon this truth: God is within me; she will not say: I feel God within me. Rather, she suffers from her inability to unite herself to her God as she desires.

82. In various passages St Teresa has described these mystical transports. "Often, on a sudden, a desire rises up, I know not how. From this desire, which, in an instant, penetrates the soul entirely, is born an anguish so keen that the soul is raised above herself and above all created things. . . . *It then seems as if God were at a great distance from the soul*—Y con parecerme que esta entonces *lejisimo Dios;* at intervals, however, he discovers his grandeurs to her in the most extraordinary manner possible to conceive" (*Life*,

ch. xx, p. 149). "I call transport—impetus llamo—a desire which takes possession of the soul, sometimes out of the time of prayer; but the remembrance sometimes suddenly comes to her that she is absent from God" (*Relacion*, v, p. 35).

"As the soul realises more and more the grandeurs of her God, and sees herself *so far from him*—tan ausente—and widely separated from the enjoyment of him, her desire grows greater, because her love has also grown in the measure in which she has discovered how this great God and Lord deserves to be loved" (*Sixth Mansion*, ch. ii, p. 173).

83. Neither is it the presence of God within her which strikes the contemplative soul when she receives clear lights concerning the dogmas of the Incarnation, the Redemption. More generally, in such a case she is so deeply penetrated by the thought of God made man, of God dying for us, that other truths seem to disappear from her eyes. "From time to time," says the Ven. Mary of the Incarnation, "our Lord would suddenly give me great lights concerning the Incarnation. I remember that during one Lent all other occupation was removed from my mind, nothing remained but the sight of the grandeurs and perfections of the blessed soul of Jesus Christ and the holy affections of his divine heart. All this took place without discourse, by a simple view and a single glance of love" (*Life*, Part I, ch. vi).

84. In all the states which we have just described, mystical grace was acting powerfully, but there are others in which it is scarcely perceptible. St John of the Cross (*Night*, I, ix, p. 28) teaches that it may then be recognised by this simple sign: "It is, that the soul experiences no pleasure in thinking of anything whatsoever, either low or elevated." In this state mystical grace has no effect whatever on sensitive nature, and although she is in the mystical state, the soul, in this case, would certainly not say, "I feel God within me." St Francis de Sales is alluding to this mystical aridity when he says: "Sometimes the soul neither hears her well-beloved, nor speaks to him, NOR DOES SHE FEEL ANY

SIGN OF HIS PRESENCE. She simply knows that she is in the presence of her God, and that he is pleased she should be there" (*Love of God*, Book VI, ch. xi). Then he gives the famous comparison of the statue motionless in its niche, a comparison which he had employed six years previously in a letter (January 16, 1610) to St Jane de Chantal; which clearly proves that he is here describing the state of that great Saint.

85. The mystical state without any sweetness is frequent at the beginning of the contemplative way. It constitutes that first mystical purgation called by St John of the Cross the "night of the senses." But there is another purgation much more severe, which certainly belongs to the mystic way, called by the same Saint the "night of the spirit." This purgation, so terrible but so salutary, is, he tells us, the effect of an infused light, very sublime but very painful, which enlightens the soul as well concerning the greatness and sanctity of God as concerning her own nothingness. "In the rays of so pure a light, the soul sees herself utterly miserable and filthy; it seems as if God had set himself against her, and she herself were set against God" (*Night*, Book II, ch. v, § 6, p. 60). "In the midst of the pangs of this contemplation by which she is being purified, the soul sees herself as if in the shadow of death; she experiences torments like those of hell, for this (purifying) contemplation *consists in the sense of being deprived of God*, chastised, repulsed by him."[1] "The thirst of love has its root and living source in the higher part of the soul, that is, in the spirit, which perceives and understands what it is feeling, and the *privation of what it desires*" (*Night*, Book II, ch. xiii, p. 92). In this night of the spirit the soul is in a mystical state; she has all along that high idea of God given her by the Holy Spirit as well as the pure and intense love, also infused, which then tortures her. Yet this mystical state is very different from that in which she would have said with a sweet consolation: "I feel God within me."

86. Thus we see that contemplatives, far from being

[1] *Night*, Book II, ch. vi, § 2, p. 63.

always under the influence of the same sentiment, pass through very diverse states of soul; those who are ever so little conversant with the lives of the Saints cannot fail to have remarked this. We will be content with giving as example the Ven. Mother Mary of the Incarnation:

"Sometimes," says her biographer, "she was greatly troubled by the sight of the purity of God; her least personal imperfections then appeared to her as monstrous iniquities, the thought of which became insupportable. Sometimes it was the splendour of the majesty and grandeur of God which suddenly appeared to her. At this sight she became so penetrated by the feeling of her own baseness and nothingness that she almost swooned away. Sometimes also the Beloved sweetly approached her heart, and by marvellous touches[1] of an infinite sweetness, began to make her feel the delight of his presence" (*Life*, i, 6).

We cannot, then, regard the sentiment of the presence of God, whatever be its nature, as the characteristic, the essential and distinctive mark of mystical states, for *in that case there would be no mystical purgations*, and many states could not be regarded as mystical which certainly are so. Thus the opinion which places the sentiment of the presence of God at the base of *every* mystical state, an opinion totally unknown before the last few years, is manifestly untenable.[2]

87. It has not been waste of time to explain with all possible precision the nature of the mystical state, for our conclusions will differ widely according to the idea we have of it.

Should a father give a caress or a kiss to his child, it is doubtless a mark of affection which will encourage the child to love him; but it is only an encouragement; the child might love his father equally well had he received no caress. This is how certain authors have

[1] See below, No. 104, what is here meant by *touches*.

[2] The following Chapter X, on the realisation of the presence of God, which the author relegated to an appendix in the second edition, has been inserted here in the place which it originally occupied in the first edition.—*Note of Translator*.

considered the mystical state; for them it is a caress which God bestows on his friends, a simple encouragement which he affords them. And hence they conclude: desire the love of God, but not divine caresses; be humble enough to think that God reserves his caresses for more worthy souls; for yourself, only ask to grow in virtue without aspiring to any other favour.

But if the mystical state consists in that illumination of the understanding which gives a sublime idea of God, with a correlative action of grace on the will, communicating a great power of loving, we see an immense difference. It is no longer a caress, no longer a secondary favour, of an accidental character, a grace outside the common way. It is the means of leading the soul on to perfect love; it is a grace eminently desirable. Whoever has read attentively the great masters cannot, we think, have the least hesitation between these two opinions.

CHAPTER X

THE MYSTICAL REALISATION OF THE PRESENCE OF GOD

1. *Nature of the realisation of the Divine Presence.*

88. In what way is the contemplative conscious of the divine presence within him? Is it the consequence of a physical contact of God, touching the soul substance to substance? Or is it because he feels the manifest operation of God, acting on the powers of his soul? In the first case there would be a new element, very distinct from the intellectual and loving communications of contemplation. In the second case it would be these very communications and the sensible sweetnesses which they produce which would bring about the conviction of the presence of God. Now it seems to us that on this point there is no possible doubt. The first explanation would give a very different conception of the mystic state from that of the masters; it would become an altogether exceptional favour, as extraordinary as the greatest miracles, and it could only be accepted on the most formal and undeniable testimony. The second explanation is that of the great masters of mysticism. These two assertions are easily proved.

89. The contact of substance with substance between God and the soul *would evidently be a phenomenon of a purely spiritual nature, the soul alone participating in it, to the exclusion of the body, a phenomenon altogether outside the laws which govern the human organism.* When our souls shall be separated from our bodies, they will then be the theatre of phenomena of this kind, phenomena so different from those which we experience in our actual condition, that we cannot formulate any idea of them. Hence the words employed to designate them are necessarily inadequate. Spirits know each other: this spiritual knowledge is sometimes called intellectual vision. The term is

accepted, but we must take care not to let ourselves be led astray by the word "vision." In intellectual knowledge, there are no images, and we can have no idea in what consists that knowledge which one spirit has of another spirit, or even of corporal beings. Again, we say that spirits speak to one another, but the word is very incorrect. There is no sound, no word in angelic language, not even the thought-word which we express interiorly when we speak to ourselves. We, indeed, incarnate our idea in a word which is for us the indispensable sign; there is nothing of this in the thought or language of angels. Spirits can also act upon one another, and this action may be either agreeable or disagreeable in its effect. If we wish to describe this action as a touch, by analogy with the action produced by one body on another, let us be careful to remember that it no more resembles the sensation of touch than intellectual vision resembles our bodily sight, or spirit language has any likeness to ours.

90. Can we say, then, that the fundamental and constitutive element of the mystic state is one of these spiritual impressions produced by one spirit acting on another spirit? *A priori*, nothing is more improbable. All these phenomena, which belong to spirits, have nothing to do with the soul when united to the body; *they place those who receive them outside their condition of human beings.* Besides, according to theologians, it is an extraordinary privilege, and one very exceptionally accorded, to know with a purely intellectual knowledge without sensible species, as do the angels, to converse with them in their own manner. It would be an equally unusual and exceptional privilege to experience the effect produced by one pure spirit upon another pure spirit. If intellectual vision is a favour which we ought not to desire, a favour to be placed in the ranks of the greatest miracles, the sensation of a spiritual touch thus understood would be a favour quite equally extraordinary. How can we, then, admit that this is the foundation of the mystical state?

91. Scaramelli understood this. After affirming[1]—

[1] *Dirett. myst.*, tr. III, No. 24.

although without any proof—that in quietude the soul is touched by a spiritual substance, and that it experiences a sensation adapted only to pure spirits—*sensazione adattata al puro spirito*—he adds that the spirit cannot produce these sensations by its own substance, but rather by means of its powers, which are the intellect and the will—*per mezzo delle sue potenze l'intelleto e la volonta.* These spiritual sensations are thus brought back by him to acts of understanding and love—*atti esperimentali di amore;* acts proceeding from the gift of wisdom, which gives light to the intellect to penetrate divine truths, and communicates an ardent and sweet love to the will. He thus returns to the true doctrine, that of the masters.[1]

2. *The consciousness of the presence of God according to the saints.—St. Francis de Sales.*

92. According to the masters, it is indeed by acts of love, eminently gentle and sweet, not acquired by our own efforts but communicated gratuitously, that, in the mystical state, God makes his presence felt. St Francis de Sales expresses this repeatedly: "It *sometimes* happens that our Lord imperceptibly pours into the depth of the heart *a certain sweet delight* which bears witness to his presence," and it is this which produces mystical recollection; very different from that which we

[1] This had been understood by others before him. Honoré de Sainte-Marie, for example (tome I, p. 554, Pt. II, Diss. x), says: "The five spiritual senses, which mystical theologians place in the superior part of our soul, are not five other powers different from the understanding and the will, but different acts which proceed from these two powers." Père Nouet says the same (*Introd. à la vie d'or,* V, xiv, last chapter). According to B. Albert the Great, the spiritual senses are nothing else than certain conceptions of the spirit, bearing on those truths which are the object of contemplation (*Comp. theol. verit.,* ch. lvi). We should expose ourselves to grave errors if we took literally certain expressions of the mystics. St Bernard, for example, calls contemplation the kiss given by the Word to the Bride-soul. Those who believe in a real palpation of the Divinity may be tempted to see here a confirmation of their doctrine. Now the holy doctor himself explains that by kiss he understands the graces of light and love accorded to the understanding and will (*In Cant., serm.* viii, No. 6).

obtain for ourselves "by election." Our Lord instils "*certain feelings of celestial consolation into our hearts, and by this means, making them feel his loving presence,* he draws to himself all the faculties of our soul, which gather round him and are recollected in him. . . . To sum up, all this recollection takes place by love, which, *feeling the presence of the Beloved by the attraction which he instils into our hearts,* gathers in and draws to itself all the powers of the soul."[1] "Holy quietude has various degrees, for sometimes it is only in the will, in which it is sometimes felt *sensibly,* at others imperceptibly; inasmuch as it sometimes happens that the soul draws an incomparable contentment *from feeling by certain interior delights that God is present to her* . . . and at other times the soul experiences a certain ardour in being in the presence of God, which is at that time imperceptible to her."[2]

Clearly, then, the holy doctor believes that the sentiment of the presence of God is not the foundation of the mystic state, since he admits that this realisation is not always present, and that holy quietude may be present without any sign of the presence of the Beloved being experienced.[3] Still more, he certainly does not see in this consciousness of the presence of God a substantial touch.

3. *St Teresa's doctrine.*

93. St Teresa's doctrine is precisely the same. She also, like St Francis de Sales, recognises that the soul sometimes experiences feelings of love of great sweetness, which suppose a direct action on the part of God. These she calls "tastes" (*goûts*), and she distinguishes carefully these (contemplative) tastes from the contentments (of affective prayer) which come from our own considerations and which we procure for ourselves by

[1] *Love of God,* Book VI, ch. vii.
[2] *Ibid.,* ch. xi.
[3] This was precisely the case with St Jane de Chantal, and the proof that these words apply to her is that the Saint introduces here the comparison with the statue which he had written first for the Saint six years before. *Letter* of January 16, 1610.

our own efforts.[1] These tastes being obviously produced by God, the soul which experiences them will say quite naturally: I feel the divine influence, God is acting upon me: I feel that he is quite close to me. Or else she will say: I feel the divine operation within me; I feel that God is in me. Whichever way it is, she cannot doubt the presence of God, all the more because her understanding is at the same time illuminated by a light of faith, giving her an intimate grasp of this truth and an almost irresistible conviction of it.

The passages we are about to quote will show that this is St Teresa's real meaning.[2]

"When I began to experience a little supernatural prayer, that is, quietude . . . I seemed to feel the presence of God, as indeed I did." In what way this sweet presence made itself felt the Saint does not say, but she immediately adds: "It is an enjoyable prayer if God assists, and contains great delights."[3]

94. Let her tell us how the soul, in a state of quietude, understands that she is very close to God. "This prayer makes peace in the soul, or rather, God establishes his peace in it by his divine presence, as he did to the devout Simeon. All the powers, indeed, enter into repose. The soul understands, quite otherwise than she could have done by the exterior senses, that she is already near her God, and that, could she but take one step farther, she would become but one thing with him by union. She does not see this either with the eyes of the

[1] *Fourth Mansion,* ch. i and ii. Cf. *Degrees,* Books II and III, Pt. iii, § 2.

[2] We have been reproached with not discussing certain passages of St Teresa which are brought forward as proving that the presence of God, or the interior touch of God, constitutes the mystical state. That this is not the meaning of these passages seemed to us so clear that discussion was unnecessary. To prevent fresh reproaches we quote them now, and the reader may judge for himself. Besides, they are in themselves interesting and instructive. Only a few lines after he has thus reproached us, the same author declares that those who ignore so fundamental a truth have an inexact notion of mysticism. This condemnation is clearly meant for ourselves! But we take comfort from the number and authority of those who, like ourselves, ignore or misunderstand this so-called fundamental truth, and the very small number who receive it.

[3] *Life,* xii, 2.

soul or of the spirit. Neither did the just Simeon see anything in the poor little Infant. To judge by the manner in which this Child was clothed and by the small number of persons who followed him, Simeon might have taken him for the child of very poor people rather than for the Son of the Heavenly Father, but the divine Infant made himself known.[1] It is in the same way now that the soul recognises him. Yet she may not see him so clearly, not understanding how it is she understands, but she sees herself to be within the kingdom, or at least *near* to the King who will bestow itu pon her. . . ."[2]

"Then, great *delights* are experienced *in the body*, and a great *satisfaction in the soul*. The powers are not lost,[3] for they are able to realise who it is they are near; the understanding and memory are free, it is now the will which is captive. . . . These souls are then *so near to God* that they see that they could converse with him by signs.[4] They are in the palace, *very near the King*, and they see that he has begun to give them his kingdom."[5]

"In this prayer, the will loves without any labour being contributed by the understanding; our Lord wills that, without thought,[6] it should realise that it is in his presence. Let it be content to drink the milk which he places in its mouth . . . let it relish this sweetness without seeking to know how it enjoys, nor what it enjoys; let it thus attain to self-oblivion, sure that he near whom it remains will not fail to provide for its needs."[7]

Here we see an interior illumination similar to that by which the presence of God was revealed to Simeon. We see the profound peace, the satisfaction produced by mystic love, and the repercussion of this love upon the body itself by sensible enjoyment. All this in no way resembles a substantial touch; besides, in this state, as

[1] By an interior illumination, and by the celestial consolations which inundated the holy old man, and inspired his *Nunc dimittis*.
[2] *Way of Perfection*, xxxi, 1.
[3] As in ecstatic prayer.
[4] By the expression of their face, by their imploring looks, by their whole attitude, breathing confidence and love.
[5] *Ibid.*, No. 2.
[6] With no need of reflecting or reasoning.
[7] *Ibid.*, No. 8.

the Saint declares, it is not the divine contact in the centre of our being that is felt, but we understand that we are *very close* to God.

95. Elsewhere the Saint has explained how the conviction arrives that quietude comes from God. This would have been the opportunity to speak of a substantial touch, and St Teresa would certainly have done so had she believed in it.

She had just explained how this prayer procures for the soul great peace and contentment, deep repose of the powers, and sweet delights. But how are we to recognise that these benefits come from God? Could not the soul procure them by her own efforts, or could they not be communicated by the devil, in order to deceive her? The hand of God is recognised in his works, which are humility, disinterested love, desire of solitude, etc. In one word, the soul sees that she now possesses the foretaste of every good; scarcely anything is wanting to make every virtue flourish. The soul sees this clearly, hence she cannot doubt that God has been with her (that he has been the author of her quietude); if she begins to think of her falls and her imperfections, she returns to her former fears (she fears that the author of these delights was not God).[1] Would St Teresa have used such words had she thought that, in quietude, the soul receives so extraordinary a favour as the divine contact? In such a case, without referring to *effects*, it would be by the contact itself that the operation of God would be recognised, a contact which, certainly, the soul could not procure for herself, nor the devil imitate.

96. "While I was representing to myself our Lord within me," she says elsewhere, "and at other times while I was engaged in reading, I used suddenly to experience so strong a feeling of the presence of God that I could by no means doubt that he had been within me, or rather that I was myself as if swallowed up in him."[2] What had happened to produce this conviction in her the sequel explains: in this state "the soul seems

[1] *Life*, Book XV, ch. ix. St. Teresa had personally experienced this anguish. Cf. *Life*, ch. xxv.

[2] *Life*, Book X, ch. i.

to be out of herself, the will loves, the understanding, I think, though it is not lost, does not reason . . . it seems as if stunned by the greatness of what it apprehends."

97. In another passage, after speaking of those joys of the mystic state which all our efforts are powerless to produce, and which can only come from God, St Teresa draws this conclusion: "God desires to make the soul comprehend that he is so *near* her, that she has no need to send him messengers, she can speak to him without raising her voice; he is so *close* that he understands the smallest movement of her lips. . . . We know very well that he always hears us, and that he dwells with us . . . but this Emperor, this Lord of our souls, would now make us comprehend that he understands us; he would make us comprehend *what his presence is doing in us*, and, particularly, he desires to begin to operate in our soul, *pouring into it great satisfaction, both interior and exterior*."[1]

In this passage St Teresa explains the sentiment of the presence of God in exactly the same way as St Francis de Sales.

98. She gives the same explanation in her *Thoughts on the Love of God*, in which she elucidates some verses from the *Canticle of Canticles*. "He causes in the interior of the soul so *great a sweetness* that it is easy to understand that our Lord is very *close* to her. This takes place in that prayer which I call the prayer of repose (*quietude*) on account of the repose of the powers."[2]

99. Lastly, if it were possible to be still more clear and categorical, the Saint has been so in the passage in which she explains how the sentiment of the presence of God differs from the intellectual vision of our Lord. "It is not like that presence of God which is *often*[3] felt,

[1] *Life*, ch. xiv, 3 and 4. Interior satisfaction is the peace and contentment of the will; exterior satisfaction is sensible enjoyment.

[2] Ch. iv, No. 2.

[3] Would St Teresa have employed this word "often," would she have expressed herself as she has done, if she had regarded the realisation of the presence of God, such as she explains it here, as the *essential foundation* of all prayer of quietude?

especially by those who are favoured with the prayer of union and quietude. As soon as we wish to begin to pray, we find someone to pray to; it seems that someone is listening to us, by the *effects and spiritual feelings* which we experience, and which consist in *great faith* and *great love*, firm resolutions and *tenderness*. This is a great grace from God, and one which ought to be very highly esteemed by the recipients. It is a very high state of prayer, but it is not a vision, *since we understand the presence of God by the effects which he produces in the soul. This is the way in which his Majesty wishes to make his presence felt.*"

Does it not seem as if, in this passage, in which she explains her idea so clearly, St Teresa wished to refute in advance those who would uphold a theory concerning the sentiment of the presence of God so different from that of the masters? If God makes himself felt in the mystic state, it is not otherwise than by the effects which he produces, and which are a lively faith, evidently due to mystical lights,[1] an ardent love which produces resolutions, and sensible enjoyments which she here calls tenderness (*tenura*).[2]

[1] Besides, if the faith here spoken of rested on learned deductions, it would be in no way a sign of the presence of God, but rather of the vigour of the intelligence or the rectitude of the judgement.

[2] Need we discuss that other passage of her letter to Père Rodriguez Alvarez, in which, desiring to explain what she means by interior recollection, she says that the soul is recollected as if it had other senses which would destroy the effect of the exterior senses by drawing them into itself? *Parece* may be translated "it would seem" or "one would say that it has." Even in this letter—and there are other examples elsewhere—she employs the word *parece* to indicate a thing which is not, but which one would think to be so. For example, No. 18 in the flight of the spirit: one would say that the soul has escaped from the body (see above, No. 37); and No. 26: one would say that there is a real wound, as if an arrow were piercing one's heart. It is impossible to draw the conclusion from this passage that St Teresa believed in the actual existence of certain interior senses, least of all that of touch.

4. *Doctrine of St Bernard, St Bonaventure, St Thomas, Surin, Grou, etc.*

100. Long before St Francis de Sales and St Teresa, St Bernard at different times had expounded the same doctrine, explaining the visits of our Lord by the ardours of love experienced by the faithful soul: *tunc scit anima quoniam juxta est Dominus, cum se senserit illo igne succensam et dixerit cum Propheta: "De excelso misit ignem in ossibus meis et erudivit me," et illud: "concaluit cor meum intra me et in meditatione mea exardescet ignis"* (In Cant. Serm. xxxi, 4). Returning to this subject in Sermon lxxiv, 2, he repeats the same thing: *cum sentit gratiam, agnoscit praesentiam,* when the grace is felt, the soul recognises the presence of the Word.

101. In the following century, St Bonaventure also describes this presence of God, which is wrought by contemplation, and explains it by its effects, and in no way by substantial contact. "There are three ways in which I may know that God is present. For either he is present by an effect proper to himself.[1] This is contemplation, which is the more eminent in that *the effect of divine grace in oneself is more deeply felt,* or that God is more clearly seen in his creatures. Or else God is present to me by a sign which belongs to himself alone, and this is an apparition.[2] In the third case, God is seen in his own light and as he is in himself: then God is seen face to face, and this is intuitive vision."[3]

102. This operation of God producing effects—and particularly an ineffable delight—which can only be attributed to him, thus manifests his presence, and gives the soul the *experimental knowledge* of God. Hitherto, she has known God by faith, by the teaching of others; henceforth she knows him, or, at least, she knows his goodness, his sweetness, by what she feels in herself. She sees by *her own experience* what God is, of what

[1] Which cannot be attributed to any other.

[2] The saintly doctor gives as an example the apparition of God to Abraham.

[3] *In Lib. II Sent.,* dist. 23, a. 2, Q. 3, ad 6.

great happiness and sweetness he is the source. Let us listen to St Thomas explaining these words of the Psalmist: *Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus:* "There are two manners of knowing the divine bounty; one is speculative, and in this connection it is not permitted to doubt or question whether the will of God is sweet, whether he is full of kindness. The other means by which we know the will (good pleasure) of God (in our regard) and his bounty is experimental knowledge. We have this *experimental knowledge when we 'taste' the divine sweetness in our own hearts.*"[1] In his opuscule No. 60, *De Human. Christi*, c. 24, he teaches that, without a particular revelation, it is possible to find in the depth of our soul a triple conjectural sign: the witness of our conscience, when we know that we love God; then anxiety to hearken to and especially to practise the word of God; lastly, that *interior relish of the divine wisdom*, which is like a foretaste of future bliss.[2]

103. Another justly celebrated writer, who certainly had a deep experience of what he describes, Père Surin, often explains this mystic consciousness of the presence of God, and his explanation is precisely that of the great masters whom we have just quoted. "What is it to find God? It is when the soul feels God within her, that is, her heart united to him . . . in a *tranquillity* which is experienced when God is present to man. This consists

[1] St Thom. II-II, Q. 97, a. 2, ad. 2. Thus have theologians always understood the experimental knowledge of God. We have already shown this above (Nos. 25, 32, and 66) by very clear passages from St Bonaventure, Gerson, Richard of St Victor. In his commentary on the *Book of Sentences,* I, dist. xiv, Q. 2, a. 2, ad 2 et ad 3, St Thomas further explains this so-called experimental knowledge by the gifts—and he names the gift of wisdom—which are poured into us by the three divine Persons, and which are a source of joy to us. This he repeats in the *Summa,* I, Q. 43, a. 5. Suarez (*De Gratia,* Book II, ch. xviii, No. 18), explaining this experimental knowledge and love of God, makes it consist in the supernatural effects produced in the soul, in *affective* feelings which can only be the result of a particular action of the Holy Spirit. Hence it is absolutely impossible to draw from these words, "experimental knowledge of God," a proof of divine contact.

[2] Cp. Père Froget, *Habitation du Saint-Esprit,* Pt. II, ch. v, No. 5. If St Thomas had believed in a divine contact he would have spoken clearly of it in this passage.

in a *serenity of heart,* in a peace . . . *in a sweetness and a delight* which keep the soul in a state of joy. . . . *The sweetness* comes from the inflow of supernatural grace which occupies the centre of the soul and holds the powers. . . . The heart, finding this sweetness which makes her feel what God is, becomes as if melted into him." This is an "experimental enjoyment of God."[1]

To those who practise genuine abnegation, "our Lord gives himself in such a manner that they feel themselves united to him by a '*taste*' and a *satisfaction* in their soul which fills all their powers. . . . These souls in reality possess Jesus Christ and enjoy him, not by clear vision, but by an exquisite and delicious feeling of faith and love."[2] "These supernatural kinds of union, so often spoken of by the author of the *Imitation* and other mystical books, are very high participations of God . . . they are treasures of grace and truth which fill the mind with other *lights* than those gained in the schools, other *tastes* and *feelings* than those which God ordinarily bestows on the imperfect . . . these are the true favours which lead to sanctity."[3] "Those who take the necessary pains to mortify their hearts, possess God, who fills all their powers; their understanding and will, their memory, imagination, appetite, and the body itself; they are filled with ineffable gifts from God, by which they can lead a life both supernatural and divine."[4]

104. Another author, whose writings show clearly that he had personal experience of the states he describes, Père Grou, gives the same explanation.[5] "This is a real presence of God, which consists in an infused and habitual peace. . . . The soul is conscious of this presence within her, she cannot doubt it; from it she derives *effects* so intimate and so sweet that *it is evident to her that God alone could produce them.*"

105. "The Lord makes his presence felt," says Richard of St. Victor, "without showing his face. He

[1] *Fondements de la vie spirituelle,* Book II, ch. vii.
[2] *Ibid.,* Book III, ch. iv.
[3] *Ibid.,* Book IV, ch. iv.
[4] *Ibid.,* Book V, ch. xiv.
[5] *Maximes spirituelles,* fourth and tenth Max.

pours in *his sweetness*, but without manifesting his beauty; he diffuses his delights, but his splendour does not appear; his sweetness is thus felt, but his face is not seen. He is still surrounded by clouds and darkness."[1]

106. In his journal Balthazar Alvarez relates that one day during his prayer he "felt that the Lord was present." Then, explaining this state, he says: "The soul seems to experience what St Denis says in the first chapter of his *Mystical Theology*, that understanding nothing, she is raised above all understanding. For while on one side she appears to know nothing, on the other she can apply herself to nothing else; yet can she not fail to be *entirely satisfied with what she possesses;* and although she neither sees nor *touches* it, she has more certainty and evidence thereof than of anything that she can see or touch."[2]

107. Let us conclude with these words of Bossuet: "In passive prayer . . . the soul knows not where she is; she only knows that all is well with her, and a *peace* which nothing can disturb makes her feel that she is not far from God."[3]

5. *Conclusion.*

108. Do not all these conclusions abundantly prove our thesis? In the mystical state the presence of God is realised because the operation of God acting on the powers of the soul is clearly manifested. But if this is so as a general rule, may we not admit that sometimes, and as a most exceptional favour, there may be a real action of spirit on spirit, of substance on substance, between God and the soul? This would be an inexplicable and even incomprehensible phenomenon, because it is of a purely spiritual nature, yet we are inclined to believe that it is the case. Probably certain passages of St John of the Cross ought to be explained in this way. But if we admit that such is the nature of these divine touches, this is a fresh and undeniable argument that the divine contact does not form the fundamental

[1] *De grad. viol. charit.*

[2] His *Life*, by the Ven. Louis Dupont, ch. xxv. Père Nouet says the same, *Introd. à la Vie d'or*, Book IV, ch. xvii.

[3] *États d'or*, Book VII.

element of the mystical state, for the holy writer *carefully distinguishes these divine touches from the general and confused knowledge of God which, for him, is the basis of the mystical state.*[1] In his eyes they are something of quite a different nature, and he declares that they are only accorded to souls already far advanced in the mystical state, who have undergone the purgation of the night of the spirit.[2]

109. It may seem to some that we have laboured this point unnecessarily, but it is of capital importance that our idea of the mystical state should be clear and precise, for on this depends the correctness of the conclusions we draw concerning it.

[1] *Ascent*, Book II, ch. viii, x, xxiii. It seems as if as much might be said of the contact spoken of by Père Surin (*Love of God*, Book III, ch. vi).

[2] *Dark Night*, Book II, ch. xxiii. Cp. *Living Flame*, str. ii, verse 4.

CHAPTER XI

THE PHASES OF THE MYSTICAL STATE

1. *It is impossible to measure the intensity of mystical graces.*

110. One of the most difficult questions in spiritual doctrine is certainly the classification of mystical states. What ought to be the guiding principle of this classification? Many authors, especially during the last two centuries, have sought to establish a kind of graduated ladder, distinguishing the several mystical states according to their intrinsic value. According to them, one mode of prayer would be an elementary mystical state, another one more elevated, and so on. This would certainly be the best method of classification were it possible, but we scarcely believe that it is. In any case, we cannot establish the degree of intensity of the mystical state by the effects manifested exteriorly, such as recollection, then absorption, then complete alienation of the senses. The mystical state, indeed, *is a state essentially interior and hidden, and there is no exterior characteristic enabling its intensity to be measured with certainty.* Thus, ecstasy is a phase of the mystical state, but, in contradiction with the teaching of certain authors, we cannot see therein a determined degree of the mystical ascent; still less can it be said that ecstasy takes place when the soul arrives at a given degree of light or love. Père Lallemant, who condemns this division of the degrees of contemplation, based upon the more or less complete suspension of the senses, gives his reason extremely well: "Without rapture, a soul will sometimes have a more sublime light, a clearer knowledge, a more excellent operation of God, than another with extraordinary raptures and ecstasies. The Blessed Virgin was raised to a higher state of contemplation than all the angels and all the saints put together, and

yet she never had raptures. Our Lord enjoyed beatific vision without ecstasy. The blessed in heaven will enjoy the perfect use of their senses" (Seventh Principle, ch. iv, a. 7).

This doctrine of Père Lallemant cannot be called in question. Does not St John of the Cross teach that when a soul has undergone a complete purification, "ecstasies no longer take place: this soul enjoys the liberty of the spirit without losing the liberty of the senses."[1] Still, God may send them raptures, but the ravishment, as he made known to St Teresa, may perhaps be accorded or refused for the advantage of those who are witnesses rather than for the good of the person himself (*Relacion* xii, Book II, p. 46; Édition des Carmelites, *Relation* ix).

III. Bernadette at the Grotto of Lourdes was in ecstasy; it is not probable that while our Blessed Lady was showing to the pious child her incomparable charms, the latter was receiving at the same time mystical lights. If she did receive any such, were they equal to those received during rapture by St Catherine of Siena, St Teresa, St Ignatius, etc.? Were they superior to those received by many of the Saints without losing the use of their faculties? No one could believe it to be so. A goodly number of Saints, while yet children, have begun to have ecstasies, some at four years old, others at six; they had certainly not yet reached a very high degree of the mystical state.

And it is precisely for this reason that the Saints neither desire for themselves, nor wish that others should desire, ecstasies. If these had constituted a more elevated degree in the mystical ascent, the desire of them would not have been forbidden.[2] Rightly, then, they distin-

[1] *Dark Night,* Book II, ch. i, p. 53; St. Teresa, *Seventh Mansion,* ch. iii. In the *Life of Mother Frances of the Mother of God* we read that our Lord, at her urgent prayer, strengthened her so that she was able to bear in herself his operations, without anything appearing externally (ch. v, *sub fine,* p. 61.)

[2] Let it not be said that it is permissible to desire ecstasies without any exterior manifestation, for ecstasy consists precisely in the alienation of the senses, become incapable of exercising their functions; to desire ecstasy without this phenomenon would be to desire ecstasy without ecstasy.

guish ecstasy from the divine communications which produce, or at least accompany it. Either ecstasy is the result of the direct action of God on the senses, reducing them to impotence in order not to hinder the operation of grace, or else these lights are themselves so vivid, this love which inflames the soul is so ardent, that the latter, absorbed by her interior operations, can no longer exercise her exterior and sensible functions; both suppositions are possible. But in either case ecstasy is distinct from mystical operations, just as one fact is distinct from another fact which has occasioned it, or as the effect is distinct from its cause.

112. It seems, indeed, that very sublime mystical operations are most frequently accompanied by ecstasy; but as it is possible for a soul to be in a still higher mystical state without being ravished, it cannot be said: contemplation without ecstasy is lower than ecstasy.

Neither can it be said that ecstasy is lower than spiritual marriage. We see nothing in the great writers to authorise such an assertion. It is true that the Saints have usually had ecstasies before reaching spiritual marriage, but they have also had them, though more rarely, after attaining to it. If a soul, after attaining to the state of spiritual marriage, should again experience a rapture, we must then conclude, according to the opinion we are combating, that he would then have descended a degree in the spiritual ladder!

In the spiritual marriage the soul is united to God in its inmost centre,[1] and this union, which, when arrived at its fullest development, is called union of transformation, is very close and very inexplicable. It is no longer a passing union: it continues in the midst of the affairs of life, when the soul is in ecstasy, it even remains when the rapture ceases. Thus, rapture is a phenomenon side by side with the union of transformation; it may be added to it, as it may exist without it. It is not, then, the "rough sketch," so to speak, of this union, nor even its prelude: it is possible to conceive a person who,

[1] "In the state of spiritual marriage the soul always finds God in the centre of her being" (Père de Clorivière).

without ever having been in ecstasy, might be favoured with this permanent union.

113. It is the same with the exercise of the interior faculties, the imagination and the faculty of reason. It is certain that the mystical state is more complete and more agreeable when these powers are in captivity and oppose no hindrance to the divine action; but infused love may be more intense in a soul which has to struggle against distractions than in another who has been freed from them. We say infused love. For in the mystical state the light may be greater than the love; yet the love, in its turn, may be greater than the light. It is mystical light rather than mystical love which arrests the action of the understanding and the imagination; therefore, there may be more charity in a state in which there is still some power of reflection than in a state in which all power of consideration is lost.

These important reserves being made, we may divide the mystical states according to the part played in them by the different faculties. We must only abstain from concluding that the mystical state is necessarily more intense when it is more complete, that is, when its effects on the faculties are more widespread.

2. *Mystical aridity, or arid contemplation.*

114. Sometimes the mystical element only exercises its action there where it properly resides, that is, on the summit of the intelligence and the will. Then it does not overflow upon the senses, to cause in them sweet enjoyment, it hinders neither the ramblings of the imagination nor even entirely the reflections and considerations of the mind. It is thus particularly when it is weak, as at the commencement of the mystical life. But it may be very strong; the loving element, especially, may be intense without overflowing upon the other faculties. Of this we have an example in the case of St Jane de Chantal, whose words we have quoted. Let us listen first to St John of the Cross.

"The most certain sign"—that considerations must be renounced because the mystical state has been reached

—" is that the soul delights to find herself alone with God, to give him her loving attention without particular reflections, and to remain in this quietude, this repose, this interior peace. . . . It is true that in the beginning this loving knowledge will scarcely be noticed, because it is too subtle and delicate and as if insensible, and because the soul, being accustomed to meditation, which is more sensible, scarcely perceives this purely spiritual knowledge, which is for her a novelty. . . ." (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xi, pp. 150-151). "This knowledge, this supernatural light, is insinuated into the soul with such purity and simplicity, and is so completely stripped of all intelligible forms, which are the proper objects of the understanding, that the latter is incapable of perceiving and giving account of them. . . ." (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xii, p. 158). "This love is sometimes neither remarked nor felt by the person who possesses it, because it does not reside in sensitive nature and does not produce there emotions of tenderness;[1] it resides in the soul and communicates to it much greater courage and strength than before; sometimes, however, it overflows upon the inferior nature by effects full of tenderness and sweetness" (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xxii, p. 231).

115. As to St Jane de Chantal, it is easy, from the letters we have quoted (No. 6), to analyse what was taking place in her soul. According to the letter dated June 29, 1621, her spirit, in its highest part, was united to God, but with a union at once very delicate and very simple; a union which she obtained without effort, because she understood that she could not procure it herself, but must remain united. At the same time, she recognised in herself a very sincere love of the holy will of God, a love very deep and very peaceful. This also she did not procure by her own efforts, for she made no distinct act of confidence and abandonment. And in the midst of all this, she experienced nothing in her lower nature, save now and then for short intervals.

According to another letter of the same period, but without precise date, in which she depicts the same state,

[1] *Ternura:* it is the same word St Teresa uses to designate sensible tenderness.

it may be seen that the prayer to which she had already been long attracted (it is St Francis de Sales who shows this in his reply) consisted in remaining in the simple view of God and of her own nothingness, renouncing reflections and casting aside all the thoughts and solicitudes which presented themselves. Our Lord, she assures us, then communicated to her lights a thousand times superior to those which she could have acquired by any number of reflections and imaginations, and placed in her soul the sentiments which were befitting.[1]

She was then supernaturally enlightened and received the grace of a very perfect infused love; mystical elements were thus bestowed in generous measure. Otherwise, indeed, it would have been impossible to remain thus in the simple view of God; nevertheless she experienced nothing in her lower nature. Thus we see that it is possible to be raised to a very high state of contemplation and remain in aridity, the inferior appetite experiencing no emotion.

3. *The Mystical State when sensible and sweet.*

116. The mystical element may produce no effect on the lower nature; on the other hand, it may also produce therein the most delicate delights.

No one has explained better than Suarez the part which may be played by the sensitive appetite in mystical phenomena. "That the sensitive appetite can play its part in contemplation, which is, however, a thing wholly spiritual and divine, is a manifest fact of common experience. It is in this sense that writers ordinarily understand this passage of the Psalm: 'My heart and my flesh have rejoiced in the living God.' And the reason of this is that in contemplation the superior appetite is excited by joy, love, and other similar movements, and that it communicates its emotions to the inferior appetite. It must then be recognised that on the part of

[1] Speaking of this prayer of the simple presence of God, she writes to Guy-Lasnier, Abbé de Vaux, founder of the Visitation of Angers: "This manner of prayer has in its simplicity a great power of drawing souls to the total renunciation of themselves, although, ordinarily, they are destitute of 'tastes' and sensible satisfaction."

contemplation, however perfect and intense it may be, nothing hinders the sensitive appetite from sharing in the emotions of the will . . . and this co-operation of the two appetites, far from diminishing the strength of the movements of the superior appetite or will, rather augments it, for there is a natural bond between these two which mutually excites and inflames them. Thus, then, when the soul contemplates God and enjoys him through her will, the sensitive appetite, far from being reduced to impotence, is on the contrary drawn in, and takes its part in the good which the will enjoys.

"Let us say in passing, this devotion, which is experienced in the inferior appetite, ought not to be despised by spiritual men, nor regarded as the lot of the imperfect, for it may come from a very perfect and very high contemplation; besides, contemplation itself is enjoyed more easily and more frequently by its help. On the other hand, when these sensible enjoyments are lacking, we must not conclude that prayer or contemplation is imperfect; they are often hindered by corporal dispositions or by a disposition of God, who wills it thus for reasons easy to divine."[1]

117. Suarez is right in saying that consolations are not the lot of the imperfect. It must, however, be remarked, that at the beginning of the contemplative state, inferior nature plays a larger part in mystical phenomena. Sometimes, even, in the period of transition, it is difficult to decide whether the graces given are the graces of affective prayer or already contemplative graces. Indeed, with certain persons, sentiments and states of soul may be found which seem to be mystical, and yet at the same time the profound and solid virtues of true contemplatives do not appear. In these people the imagination still plays a very active part, and the sensitive appetite is strongly affected, but the little solidity of the fundamental virtues seems to indicate clearly that the will is not yet completely penetrated. It is doubtless because the two states are still mingled; from time to time the soul does receive some lights from the gifts of wisdom and understanding, while there is

[1] *De Oratione,* ch. xviii, 1, 2, 4.

also given her a certain degree of infused love; yet often also the imagination is vividly impressed and the heart deeply moved without the intervention of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Later on, if the soul has faithfully practised recollection and renunciation, the mystical state is accentuated, and becomes dominant, but it will still act strongly on inferior nature; the soul feels herself lovingly united with God, and tastes the ineffable sweetness of this love.

In the course of time, the mystical operations become more and more spiritual; they do not produce so many sensible sweetnesses; love, while becoming more intense, is also less violent; nevertheless, it often produces a full and penetrating satisfaction, a calm happiness, a profound peace. This contemplation remains sweet and joyful, but in a more spiritual manner.

4. *The Mystical State fully developed.*

118. The mystical state is complete when all the powers participate in it. It may be characterised in one word by saying that it is the state in which there are no longer distractions. As we have said, a soul may be in a more meritorious state, in a more intense exercise of love, and yet have distractions; as it may be in a weak mystical state and have few or no distractions. This latter may be the case when the sensitive appetite is deeply moved, and has a large share in the affections of the will. This happens sometimes to souls who have not passed through very severe purifications, in whom mystical lights are not yet very brilliant, and whose love is more demonstrative and ardent than profound. But often also, and even very frequently, we think, the absence of distractions is the consequence of the abundance of lights and the intensity of the love of the contemplative.

119. Such was the case with St Margaret Mary. This is proved by the passages we have already quoted, No. 2. The following page from the same Saint describes the mystical state when complete:

"Every morning when I awoke I seemed to find my

God present, to whom my soul was united as to its principle and its only plenitude. This excited in me so ardent a desire to commence my prayer that the moments I spent in dressing seemed to me hours. In my prayer I usually presented myself as a sick person before the physician. I placed myself at his feet as a living victim who has no other desire than to be immolated and sacrificed to him, in order to be consumed as a holocaust in the pure flames of his love. There I felt my heart as if lost in a burning furnace, without any sense of enjoyment. Sometimes it seemed as if my soul was separated from me, to unite and lose itself in the immense greatness of its God, without it being in my power to apply myself to the subject I had prepared. It was content to rest upon that one only Object, in which it found a plenitude so great that all the rest was indifferent to it. My understanding remained in so great a blindness that it had no other light or knowledge save that which the divine Sun of Justice communicated to it from time to time. I had no other impression nor movement than that of loving. I employed all my strength to embrace this Beloved, not with the arms of my body, but with those interior arms which are the powers of my soul. The time of prayer appeared to me so short that often I could not prevent myself from complaining to my Lord.

" My good Master, making me feel his divine presence sensibly, showed his beauties to my soul: and all my powers being at the same time bound by his love, I remained before him unable to find words to express my ardour, which was torment to me, though at the same time full of great sweetness " (*Life and Works*, Vol. II, p. 131).

120. The same state is described by St John of the Cross in the following lines:

" The supernatural knowledge and light of contemplation seize upon the soul in a manner so pure, so simple, so separated from all intelligible forms (ideas and conceptions), which are the proper objects of the understanding, that the latter neither feels this light nor is conscious of it. At times, it is when this light is most pure that it produces darkness, because it separates the

understanding from its ordinary lights, from forms and imaginary representations, and then the soul feels deeply and notices the darkness in which she is involved.

"When this divine light does not strike the soul with such force, she is unconscious of the darkness and pays no attention to the light; it seems to her that she experiences nothing, one way or the other. She remains in a deep forgetfulness; later, she will know neither where she was nor what she was doing, the time having passed without her perceiving it. Long hours sometimes elapse during this oblivion, and when the soul returns to herself, they appear to her but a moment."[1]

121. It is the completely mystical state which spiritual writers most frequently describe. This is easily understood. If we wish to give the notion of a tree, we do not say what it was when it first sprang out of the ground; when we wish to depict a flower, we do not paint it in bud, but in its complete development. Let us listen again to St Alphonsus Rodriguez:

"The third kingdom and paradise of the soul is obtained by the grace of God through the exercise of prayer and mortification. By the help of this exercise the soul is emptied of herself in order to fly away to her God and treat with him without hindrance from anyone. This kingdom and paradise is that of contemplation and union with God. The soul there contemplates the divine perfections. With the grace of God, the soul may, even in this life, attain this kingdom of contemplation, in which she enjoys an extreme peace and a delicious repose, a peace known only to those who have experienced it. The purified soul has gone to hide herself in the bosom of God, where she is as if submerged; she finds herself in his presence; God communicates himself to her in a manner very elevated and wholly divine, with great familiarity and love. The soul enjoys the divine sweetness and ineffable love of the Lord, being at the same time plunged in admiration at the contemplation of his infinite perfections, his goodness, his splendour, his beauty" (*Explan. of the petitions of the Pater*, ch. xi).

[1] *Ascent*, Book II, ch. xii, p. 158. Here the critical edition corrects previous ones.

5. *The three phases of the mystical state according to the Ven. Mary of the Incarnation.*

122. The Venerable Mother Mary of the Incarnation, who was so enlightened on the subject of which we are treating, has given an interesting classification of the mystical states. If we compare her doctrine with that of St Teresa and St John of the Cross, we shall notice that she passes over in silence the initial and incomplete mystical state, in which distractions are numerous, and in which the soul feels herself rather attracted towards God than clearly enlightened concerning his divine attributes, a state much more common than those which she describes. Thus, she considers the mystical state *arrived at its full development* when the activity of the mind has been repressed, and a long and generous mortification has cleansed the soul and rendered it more apt for mystical operations.

"In supernatural prayer," she says, "I have remarked three states which follow one another and which have their own proper and particular perfection. There are souls who do not pass beyond the first; some are raised as far as the second; others, again, happily reach the third. But in each of these three states there are divers degrees or operations to which the Holy Spirit raises them according to his good pleasure.

123. "The first state is the prayer of quiet, in which the soul who formerly was accustomed to occupy herself in the consideration of mysteries, is raised by an attraction of grace, so that she is herself astonished that without any labour *her understanding is carried away and enlightened concerning the divine attributes*, to which she remains so strongly attached that nothing can separate her from them. The soul remains in these illuminations without being able to operate of herself, but she receives and submits to the operations of God as long as it pleases his bounty to act in her. Afterwards she feels like a sponge, entirely plunged in this great ocean. . . .

"The soul, being thus attached to God as the centre of her repose and her pleasure, easily draws into herself

all her powers, to cause them to repose in the union of her Beloved. From this state she passes into a silence in which she does not speak, even to him who holds her captive, because he gives her neither permission nor power to do so. Finally she sleeps with great sweetness and pleasure on his breast. Her aspirations, nevertheless, do not rest, but are rather strengthened, while all the rest reposes, and they kindle in her heart a fire which seems about to consume her. Lastly, she enters into inaction and remains as if swooning in the arms of him who possesses her.

"The harmony of these states of the prayer of quiet is not so permanent at first, but that the soul changes sometimes to return to the mysteries of the Son of God or to the divine attributes. But whatever return she may make, her aspirations are more elevated than in the past, because the divine operations she has undergone in her quietude have brought about a deep intimacy with God, without labour, without effort, without study, but only urged by his divine Spirit. If she is faithful in the practice of the virtues which God demands of her, she will pass on and enter more deeply into divine intercourse with her divine Spouse" (*Life*, Book IV, ch. ix).

The Servant of God includes, then, under the name of quietude all the mystical states in which the soul, at the sight of the divine grandeurs which are revealed to her, is filled with admiration. In this state there are already aspirations which are the fruit of a very sublime love, but illumination precedes and dominates affection. Later, it will be the will which will be more directly touched by mystical grace; then, love will predominate, and the soul will be more intimately united with the Beloved; indeed, she calls this second state that of union. Let us remark in passing that the Servant of God does not understand union in the same sense as St Teresa; for the latter union is a transitory and ecstatic state; for Ven. Mary, it is habitual, and during it ecstasies sometimes take place.

124. "The second state of supernatural prayer is the prayer of union, in which God, having inebriated the soul with the sweetness of the prayer of quiet, encloses

her in his cellar of wine to fill her with perfect charity. In this state *the will governs the understanding*, which is astonished and ravished by the riches it sees in herself, and here also there are divers degrees which render the soul one same spirit with God. These are touches,[1] interior words, caresses from which are born ecstasies, raptures, intellectual visions, and other very sublime graces, which can be better experienced than described, because the senses have no part in them, the soul only passively suffering what the Holy Spirit works in her.

125. "The third and most sublime state of prayer is the divine marriage, in which God has *so taken possession of the soul that he seems to be the very foundation of her substance*. That which here passes is so subtle and divine that it cannot be adequately spoken of; it is a permanent state, in which the soul dwells calmly and tranquilly in a perfect union with God. Her sighs and aspirations are towards her Beloved in a state purified from all admixture, as far as may be in this life; by these very aspirations she speaks to him easily of his mysteries and of all that she desires."

[1] The Servant of God calls *divine touches* certain operations of God on the will. She used suddenly to receive very strong and very sweet impulsions which drew her to God and made her enjoy him as her Sovereign Good (*ibid.*, ch. x, addition).

CHAPTER XII

ORIGIN OF THE DIVISION OF CONTEMPLATION INTO MYSTICAL CONTEMPLATION AND ACQUIRED OR NON-MYSTICAL CONTEMPLATION

1. *The Masters know only mystical contemplation.*

126. We have employed indifferently the terms *mystical* state, lights, and union, and *contemplative* state, lights and union: the two words have for us the same signification. Since the last two centuries and a half many authors teach that there is a non-mystical contemplation; thus they cannot use the words "mystical" and "contemplative" the one for the other. To their doctrine we prefer that of the masters. When these latter speak of contemplation, and when they oppose it to meditation, it is certainly of mystical contemplation and of no other that they intend to speak.

From antiquity down to the seventeenth century, indeed, by contemplation is understood a kind of prayer very superior to meditation, a kind of prayer requiring new and very elevated lights, which meditation is powerless to give, poured by God directly into the soul, at the same time communicating to it an intense and pure love, which is a particular gift of his goodness. *Contemplation, then, is attributed to a grace of predilection*, a grace ordinarily accorded only to souls advanced in virtue, but to such it is accorded as a general rule, since "holy contemplation is the end and issue to which all the other exercises tend: reading, meditation, prayer";[1] it is then the normal term attained by truly faithful souls. It is of this contemplation that the great masters of mysticism, Denis, Clement of Alexandria, St Maximus, St Augustine, St Gregory, St Bernard, St Peter Damian, Albert the Great, St Thomas, St Bonaventure, St

[1] *Love of God*, Book VI, ch. vi.

Laurence Justinian, Blessed Henry Suso, St John of the Cross, St Teresa, Suarez, St Francis de Sales, etc., speak with so much approval. They know no other, they never speak of a contemplation which is not mystical.

Some modern writers have claimed, however, that they do admit it, that they speak sometimes of the one, sometimes of the other, and that in the same work and even on the same page, and that even if they do not distinguish them expressly, yet the distinction is no less clear in their minds. But no, indeed, this is not possible! For if they had recognised two kinds of contemplation, *so different from one another*, they would certainly have taken care to distinguish them, to give a separate name to each. They would not say "contemplation" without adding a word to indicate of which kind they were speaking, any more than we should say "republic" without distinction, if, in the same work, still more on the same page, we wished to speak successively of Switzerland and of the United States. We think it an insult to these great doctors to attribute to them a manner of expressing their thoughts so contrary to all the rules of language, so liable to cause confusion in the minds of their readers.

2. *Doctrine of St Francis de Sales, St Teresa, and St John of the Cross.*

127. Besides, if we examine their writings carefully, we shall see that they in no wise merit this reproach. Read, for example, St Francis de Sales,[1] who has summed up the traditional doctrine so clearly. Following the footsteps of his predecessors, he begins by dividing prayer into two kinds, meditation and contemplation; he establishes the difference between them, and all that he says of contemplation agrees admirably with mystical contemplation.

After showing how contemplation differs from meditation, he explains what takes place in this holy contemplation, and straightway describes the phenomena

[1] *Love of God,* Book VI, second and following chapters.

which belong to the mystic state. First he speaks of that loving recollection "which we do not make by our own choice, for it is not in our power to have it at will, nor does it depend on our industry, but God gives it to us when he wills." Here he already indicates the mystical sentiment of the presence of God. Then he passes on to quietude, and rests his doctrine on that of St Teresa. Again, it is certainly mystical contemplation. Where, then, have we room for a non-mystical contemplation?

128. St Teresa, who has described so many different states of prayer, and who, in the beginning at least, multiplied divisions, never breathes a word of a non-mystical contemplation.[1]

She declares quite formally in her *Life* (ch. xiii, pp. 87, 88, 89), repeating it with the same energy in the *Castle of the Soul* (*Fourth Mansion*, ch. iii, p. 61), that a soul *must not remain idle and silent until God shall place in her that prayer, all of love, which is mystical contemplation.* To enter into contemplation by our own action, which would be the case in an acquired or active contemplation, would appear to her an intolerable temerity.

129. St John of the Cross has described with great

[1] In order that we may not be accused anew "of not discussing those passages which oppose our view," let us say that the passage (*Life*, ch. ix) in which St Teresa speaks of a manner of proceeding in prayer without reflections, applies in no degree to the prayer of simple regard. The reflections which she wishes to exclude are only coherent reasonings followed up in detail, and meditation with its methodical and calculated processes. In the prayer of which she speaks, reflections are replaced by more simple considerations requiring less effort from the mind, like the facts of our Lord's life, and more place is given to the movements of the affections. She has first said, indeed, that being unable herself to follow the method of reflections, she pictured to herself our Lord within her; she considered his mysteries; she placed herself close to him in his agony in the garden; she regarded the sweat in which he was bathed, she even wished to wipe it away, but the sight of her sins held her back, etc. It is the same prayer which she has already described (ch. iv), and which she calls later the prayer of recollection (*Way*, ch. xxviii and xxix); in it she is so far from seeing contemplative prayer that in two passages she calls it a vocal prayer (xxviii and xxix), doubtless on account of the loving colloquies which fill this prayer. At the present day it goes by the name of affective prayer.

care, in three separate passages,[1] the transition from meditation to contemplation; now, everyone knows how the holy author *forbids absolutely and with insistence that a soul should leave meditation before receiving the mystical element, which is the infused and loving knowledge of God, and before receiving it in a sufficient degree to experience repugnance to considerations and to find a real sense of well-being in remaining alone with God.* That loving attention to God, out of which certain authors[2] have tried to make a non-mystic contemplation, is then absolutely the same as quietude or mystical contemplation. In a passage already quoted, No. 94, and which is applied to mystical contemplation, he indicates it indifferently by the names of quietude or loving attention. Thus, in the doctrine of St John of the Cross, so wise and so exact, there is no place for a non-mystical contemplation.

130. We might continue to make the same demonstration in the case of the other great doctors, but it would only be to weary our readers by tiresome repetitions. Let these suffice: we are in good company in refusing to admit a kind of contemplation totally unknown to such great masters.

Is it not, then, possible, it may be objected, after having often meditated, for example, on the presence of God, to remain in this thought that God is present without having received new lights? When a truth has for a considerable period been deeply pondered over, may it not sometimes be suddenly recalled to mind without the constraint of following out anew the thread of reasonings and methodical reflections, *the mind then being for a long time occupied with the same thought without much diversity in its affections?* This state, we reply, which in reality is only a variety of affective prayer, may appear possible in theory, but in practice is very rare, so rare that it does not deserve to be classed among the degrees of prayer usually the lot of faithful souls. Natural contemplation is produced either by a

[1] *Ascent,* Book II, 13, 14, 15. Edit. crit., ch. 11, 12, 13. *Night,* Book I, 8 and 9, p. 26 and following; and *Living Flame,* str. 3, verses 3, 5, p. 445.

[2] For example, Courbon: *Inst. fam. sur l'oraison mentale,* Pt. III.

beautiful spectacle, such as the view of a magnificent landscape, especially if the sight is unaccustomed, or by an ardent love, such as that with which a mother contemplates her child. Could we place before a young neophyte, hitherto little instructed, a striking picture of the greatness and generosity of God, he would probably remain for a considerable time absorbed in admiration. But after a while he would become habituated to the thought of these truths, which would no longer produce in his mind such vivid sentiments of awe and wonder. As for love, it does not effect the suspension of reasoning and reflex acts unless it is very ardent. When the supernatural love of a God whom the soul only knows in the obscurity of faith is ardent enough to produce a silent union, it is because she is free from natural attachments, and there is no longer in her any obstacle to the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We may then conclude —and experience proves the truth of this assertion— that this soul has been illuminated by the gifts of the Holy Spirit; it is these which have produced this union of love. Although the soul may not have made any notable progress in detachment, yet she may be able in time, without further need of prolonged reflection, to grasp truths already often pondered over. For all that, she will not rest in the contemplation of these truths to which she has become accustomed, and which no longer make a lively impression on her. On the contrary, almost always, if loving aspirations, such as desires, petitions, protestations, good resolutions, are not present to hold her attention, she is more exposed to distractions. Now, these distractions, so natural to the human mind, have to be borne with by infused contemplation. Produced by the Holy Spirit in the highest part of the understanding and will, its exercise is very often continued, while in her lower nature the soul endures in spite of herself the ramblings of her imagination. But if they often co-exist with infused contemplation, distractions are incompatible with natural or acquired contemplation, which invades the whole soul and necessarily occupies all its powers. Besides, in practice, such cases are not met with, or are very exceptional.

It is no doubt for this reason that the Saints have not described a non-mystical contemplation.[1]

3. *The contemplation of pagans and the learned.— Doctrine of Albert the Great and Walter Hilton.*

131. How, then, has there come to be introduced this notion of a non-mystical contemplation, called acquired or active, and opposed to what the masters called simply contemplation, and which is a mystical prayer now called passive or infused?

Pagan writers had spoken of contemplation, but what they understood by the word differed greatly from the contemplation spoken of by Christian authors. Albert the Great was the first, we believe, who commented upon this. Pagans, he remarks, were able to reach a certain contemplation which was the fruit of their researches, and which remained in their understanding without producing love in their will (*De adhaerendo Deo*, ch. ix).

132. Other mystical writers make the same remark. Thus, in an interesting book by Walter Hilton, a book very widely read in England in the fourteenth century, *The Scale of Perfection*,[2] the author, having put forward contemplation as the end to be attained (Part I, ch. iii and xiii), explains the nature of contemplation. He speaks, then, of the contemplation of learned men.

[1] Richard of St Victor is sometimes quoted as admitting this kind of contemplation. In a passage of his *Benjamin Major* (Book V, ch. ii) this author speaks of a contemplation by dilatation of spirit, which takes place when the gaze of understanding is broadened and becomes more active, without, however, exceeding the range of human efforts aided by grace. This mode of contemplation, he adds, progresses after three manners: by art, in learning either through an exact teaching or by wise researches how to govern ourselves; by exercise; by attention, applying ourselves with extreme care to the work in which we are engaged. The partisans of an acquired contemplation think that is what Richard of St Victor is here speaking of: it seems more exact to apply these words to a methodical meditation passing into affective prayer. This author, who has treated so judiciously and at such length of contemplation, everywhere else designates by this name mystical contemplation, and he distinctly declares that contemplation is a pure gift of God, and that the soul cannot raise herself to it by her own efforts (*Benjamin Minor*, ch. lxxiii).

[2] Edition by Dalgairns, London, Art and Book Company.

These, in virtue of their prolonged studies, can acquire a certain sight of truth and a certain knowledge of spiritual things; but, adds the author, this is by no means true contemplation, but only its shadow, for it can never procure that spiritual savour, that "taste" of God, that interior sweetness which can only be experienced by a soul in a high degree of charity (*ibid.*, ch. iv).

133. John of Jesus and Mary, Propositor-General of the Congregation of Discalced Carmelites of Italy, who, during his lifetime, by reason of his virtues and his knowledge, enjoyed a great authority, published in 1610 his *Scola Orationis*. After having declared that meditation is the road to contemplation, and that the latter is not obtained by our own efforts, but is poured (*infundi solet*) by God into our souls by a singular grace, he says that it is exercised through the gift of wisdom. "There is," he says, "a natural contemplation, which has for its object God, inasmuch as he is the author of nature and of natural things and truths. There is also a supernatural contemplation, in which God is regarded as the author of grace and also of supernatural mysteries and operations. This manner of contemplation is enjoyed from time to time by the servants of God who have an admirable knowledge of the mysteries of grace; they pause over this peaceful and penetrating consideration. This was in general the manner of the prophets, both when they considered things supernatural and even when they regarded the things of nature by supernatural light. Finally, there is divine contemplation in which God and his perfections are contemplated, and this by the gift of wisdom. "Here," he says, "we have that divine contemplation so highly extolled by holy writers, to which those who lead the contemplative life aspire with all their strength."

For the different modes of this contemplation the learned author refers us to St Teresa, and he declares that the different states of prayer described by her, interior recollection, quietude, union, are the divers degrees of supernatural contemplation (*ibid.*, *De vita*, act. et cont. Dub. vii and xiv).

John of Jesus and Mary was, then, faithful to the

classical doctrine on contemplation. The two first kinds of contemplation of which he speaks are not states of prayer;[1] according to him, contemplative prayer is nothing else than mystical prayer, fruit of the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The new opinion, which recognises a contemplative prayer which is the fruit of the soul's efforts, certainly does not come from him.

4. *Inexactitude of certain authors: Joseph of Jesus and Mary, Thomas of Jesus, Philip of the Holy Trinity, Honorius of St Mary, Lopez Ezquerra.—More exact doctrine of Fathers Calatayud, Michel de la Fuente.*

134. At the close of the sixteenth century there had been, especially in Spain, a general suspicion of mystical doctrines,[2] and at the beginning of the seventeenth century this distrust increased still more. St John of the Cross was the object of bitter criticism; his detractors wished his works to be condemned. Then, and, it seems to us, in order to defend this holy author, certain Carmelites conceived the idea of maintaining that the contemplative states of which he speaks are states inferior to those described by St Teresa, and of a different kind; they were not these mystical states of which men were so much afraid. Thus, St John of the Cross was not a doctor of mysticism. Let us remark that St Teresa, who died nine years before St John of the Cross and was beatified sixty years after him, already enjoyed an incontestable authority and needed no defence. St Teresa, they said, has treated of an extraordinary contemplation, which raises the soul to a knowledge and a love of God which surpass human powers. On the contrary, they added, our holy Father, Fra John of the Cross, is the great master of another kind of contemplation, that which we can obtain by our own human powers, through

[1] Many seem to forget that the natural contemplation of which authors sometimes speak is not a prayer at all, but a suspensive admiration produced by study, which has brought to light very sublime truths.

[2] See *Vie d'Union*, third edition, par. 347.

the medium of the light of faith and the ordinary assistance of grace. So we read in a treatise of the first historian-general of the Carmelite Reform, Père Joseph of Jesus and Mary, a treatise composed in the first years of the seventeenth century, and published in the critical edition of the works of St John of the Cross (Vol. III, pp. 511 and 534). Thus, according to this author, St John of the Cross only treated of asceticism.

135. It is impossible to admit that the contemplation treated of by St John of the Cross is a contemplation of another kind from that of which St Teresa speaks, a non-mystical contemplation, and no one to-day upholds this strange distinction. But we have here, certainly, one of the first indications and the origin of the doctrine which admits two different kinds of contemplative prayer.[1]

Père Arintero thinks that the first who spoke of acquired contemplation was the Benedictine Antonio Alvarado in his treatise *Del conocim. osc. de Dios*, which appeared in 1608, and very inopportunely, he says, was inserted among the works of St John of the Cross (*Edit. crit.*). Père Arintero recognises, as we do, that the contemplation spoken of by all the great doctors is

[1] Père Poulain (*Grac. d'or,* ch. iv, p. 7) attributes the term "acquired contemplation" to Denis the Carthusian, and refers to his opuscule *De Fonte Lucis,* Art. VIII. Now, neither in this opuscule nor elsewhere does Denis admit either the word or the thing; on the contrary, even in the passage quoted he gives the usual doctrine. When the soul, he says in this very place, is freed from its vices, well purified from the remains of sin, it is immediately capable of receiving these lights from above—it is fit to obtain the ray of a salutary wisdom and to be raised to the contemplation of things divine and eternal. When a man has thus been exercised as he ought to be in the purgative way, he ought to enter the illuminative way. There he applies himself to the consideration of the divine perfections; he occupies his mind in this study, *studium seu occupatio mentis circa contemplanda sublimia Dei* . . . at the same time he acquires the virtues of humility, patience, meekness, chastity, justice. God, who sees him practise these virtues, who sees him eager for truth, sighing after the fountain of wisdom, seeking to be enlightened, very soon makes his countenance to shine upon him. He illuminates him with a ray of his wisdom, he bestows on him a knowledge more clear, more delicious; that is to say, he introduces him into the contemplative and unitive way.

indeed mystical contemplation, and that they are unacquainted with any other (*Cuestiones misticas*, c. ii, a. 7).

Père Vincente de Peralta, who proves solidly that this treatise was not written by St John of the Cross, recognises also that its author, whom he believes with us to have been Père Alvarado, was the first to speak of an acquired contemplation (*Estud. francisc.*, Oct., 1919). But without certain authors who, some years later, adopted and propagated it, this new opinion would not have been accepted.

136. Thomas of Jesus (1564-1627) was the first Carmelite to speak of two kinds of contemplative prayer. In the prologue of his first work, *Grados de oracion*, published in 1609, he divides mental prayer into two classes: acquired prayer, which is meditation, and infused prayer, which is contemplation; this division is quite just and quite conformable, as we have shown (par. 35), to the doctrine of St Teresa. This prologue, which is found in the editions of 1610, 1613, 1616, and 1623, was suppressed in the later ones of 1665 and 1725, doubtless because the doctrine set forth does not square with that which recognises a non-mystical contemplation. In this same book, Thomas of Jesus qualifies as a "degree of prayer which all may obtain" the union of conformity to the divine will, and he rests this upon what St Teresa says in the *Fifth Mansion*. But, in the mind of the Saint, this is by no means a degree of prayer (cp. *supra*, par. 40), it is not prayer at all; it is a disposition of the soul to have no will of her own, an excellent disposition to which we can attain, as the Saint teaches, without receiving from God the favour of union, or weak ecstasy. Thus it was an error to qualify this disposition as a degree of prayer. Later, in his work *De Contemplatione divina*,[1] published at Antwerp in 1620, Thomas of Jesus distinguishes two sorts of contemplation, one supernatural and mystic, the other acquired.[2]

[1] Père Poulain is wrong in distinguishing two authors named Thomas of Jesus, one of whom was the author of the *Grados de oracion* and the other of the book *De Contemplatione divina*. There was only one Thomas of Jesus, who wrote both works.

[2] We do not speak here of an opuscule of Thomas of Jesus in which acquired contemplation is discussed, because it was first

137. Philip of the Holy Trinity,[1] who also belonged to the order of Carmelites, found his inspiration in the works we have just mentioned. From John of Jesus and Mary he seems to have taken some of the terms which he uses to define natural contemplation, which is that of philosophers;[2] from Thomas of Jesus he has

published only in 1886 (*The Better Part, or the Contemplative Life,* Schepens, Brussels), and which could have exerted no influence on the teaching concerning mysticism. Thomas of Jesus, who appears to have been expert in these matters, describes the contemplative state very well, but he calls acquired contemplation what we have presented, following St John of the Cross, as a contemplation supernatural and mystical; he reserves the name of infused contemplation to the higher degrees of the same contemplation. Thus it is of acquired contemplation, the only kind of which he speaks in this opuscule (p. 13), that he says: "This full and perfect knowledge of the truth is what we call contemplation. It perfects faith in an admirable manner, sharpens the understanding, and shines with such splendour before the interior eyes of the soul that, in comparison with its clarity, the knowledge obtained by meditation appears almost obscure. The latter is like a picture, and moves us but little; the other is life and truth, and victoriously attracts to itself all our affections and desires. The fruits of these two kinds of knowledge are very different: the change in our life produced by meditation is effected slowly, and as if step by step; by contemplation, on the contrary, we turn to perfection, this rapidity of knowing and efficacity of moving being the proper effect of contemplation" (p. 24). In the same way the properties and effects which he attributes to contemplation suppose not less evidently the superior graces of mystical contemplation and cannot be considered as the result of the soul's labours. Besides, the signs which this writer gives (par. 5) for passing from meditation to contemplation are similar to those which, according to St John of the Cross, indicate that the soul has received mystical lights, and that she has entered into supernatural contemplation. The counsels which he gives in ch. vi cannot possibly be followed by anyone who is not in the mystical state.

[1] Philip of the Holy Trinity published his *Summa theolog. mysticae* in 1656.

[2] John of Jesus and Mary had said very truly in speaking of natural contemplation, which is that of philosophers and is not based on faith: *Circa Deum, in quantum ipse naturae est auctor et in veritates naturales versatur;* and of the contemplation of Christians: *Circa Deum in quantum ipse gratiae est auctor et circa mysteria et opera supernaturalia versatur.* Philip of the Holy Trinity seems to us less fortunate; he says that acquired contemplation, which he nevertheless attributes to believers: *naturam ipsam pro principio immediato et Deum ut auctorem naturae pro principio primo cognoscit; contemplatio autem infusa Deum ut auctorem gratiae pro suo agnoscit immediato principio.*

borrowed the opinion that the union of the will of which St Teresa speaks (*Fifth Mansion*, ch. iii, p. 86) is a degree of prayer. In thus seeing a degree of prayer where there is only a virtue, he was also led, doubtless by analogy, to see a kind of prayer in that contemplation which up to then had been described as the outcome of study.

As to the terms "acquired contemplation," and "infused contemplation," Philip declares that he uses them by analogy with the acquired and infused virtues. The first are natural and the fruit of our own efforts, the second are supernatural and the fruit of grace. However, he adds, acquired contemplation, although natural in its essence, requires actual graces. The theory of Philip of the Trinity, which we have contested elsewhere,[1] is wanting in clearness; it much more resembles a thesis established *a priori* by a professional theologian than the description of facts known by experience. It would be difficult, we believe, to prove that the picture he paints of contemplation has any corresponding reality.

138. Besides, we have not long to wait before we find mystical writers, while using the same word, attaching to it a very different signification. One of these, a prolific and very erudite author rather than a mystic by profession, Père Honorius of St Mary (1651-1729), finding nowhere amongst ancient authors, of whom he had a wonderful knowledge, the idea of an acquired contemplation such as Philip of the Holy Trinity had described, substituted for it an entirely novel view. This opinion again is worth no more than the others.

"Acquired contemplation," he says,[2] "presupposes labour and endeavour on the part of the contemplative." Hence he concludes that all contemplative prayer which has been preceded by some effort of recollection is an acquired contemplation. Now, before being raised to ecstasy, the soul may have been able to recollect herself;[3] he assures us that acquired contemplation just as

[1] *Vie d'Union*, par. 398.

[2] *Tradition des Pères, etc.*, Pt. III, Dis. 3, Art. I, § 2. It is a work full of quotations and very valuable.

[3] St Teresa, speaking of ecstatic union, says that in its commencement it nearly always takes place at the end of a prolonged

much as that which is infused "is accompanied . . . by the prayer of quiet, the sleep of the powers, spiritual silence, ecstasy, rapture"! Hence it is not difficult for him to find in tradition this so-called acquired contemplation; whenever writers speak of the dispositions necessary for contemplation, he concludes that they are speaking of that which is acquired. "Acquired contemplation," he says, "includes essentially two things; the first is our own industry, the efforts and labour of the contemplative; the second that he should be raised little by little, and as if by degrees; acting rather than receiving, as spiritual men say. *The passages of the Fathers which express one of these things, or both together, ought certainly to be understood of acquired contemplation*" (Part II, Diss. 3, a. 3, par. 1). Is it necessary to add that after having put forward a distinction so manifestly erroneous, the passages which he alleges as proving the existence of an acquired contemplation do not prove it at all, for they apply perfectly to mystical contemplation.

139. Lopez Ezquerra, in his *Lucerna Mystica*, which appeared during the latter years of the seventeenth century,[1] had defended acquired contemplation. "He quotes twenty-five of the Fathers," says Père Poulain, "and speaks very severely of those who regard this contemplation as a modern invention" (*Grâces d'oraison*, ch. iv, 9). Thus the partisans of acquired contemplation were not without their opponents, who justly wished to abide by the traditional doctrine. Among them let us quote Père Vincente Calatayud, of the Oratory of Valencia. This writer vigorously contended with the author of *Lucerna Mystica*, reproaching him with putting into the mouths of holy doctors

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mental prayer (*Life*, ch. xviii, p. 133). The same Saint teaches very clearly that we ought to dispose ourselves for mystical contemplation (*supra*, 35 and 36). This is the ordinary teaching. (See again above, Nos. 30, 31, 35.)

[1] The real author of this work was Père Auguste Nagore, Carthusian of Saragossa, who did not publish it. Lopez Ezquerra caused the manuscript, which had fallen into his hands, to be printed under his own name at Bilbao.

what they never dreamed of teaching.[1] He dedicated his book to Benedict XIV, who, following Brancati de Laurea, had admitted acquired contemplation. The learned Pope wrote him these remarkable words: *Quod a nostris scriptis recessisti, nec tibi nec nobis grave esse debet. In his quae scribimus uti privati doctores scimus nos falli posse, nec etiam dubitamus nos aliquomodo etsi inadvertenter a veritate recessisse. In his onus est aliorum nostra refellere, corrigere, emendare; et irrationabiles profecto essemus si in his tristaremur.*

140. We might also quote as admitting no other contemplation than mystical Père Michel de la Fuente, ~~Dis~~-Calced Carmelite, who lived at the beginning of the seventeenth century, who died in the odour of sanctity, and who, after his death, worked miracles. In his book, *The Three Lives of Man*, which Spaniards speak of as being as remarkable for its literary form as for its profundity, we find the classical doctrine of the three ways.

The first life is that of the corporal man still plunged in the senses, and combating his evil inclinations; in order to pray and make resolutions, he must have recourse to his imagination. For example, if he wishes to think of death, he represents to himself a sick-bed, the death-agony, etc. (ch. i, 10).

The second life is that of the reasonable man, who conducts himself according to reason. In his mode of prayer, he makes use of considerations and reflex affections of the will; it is meditation, at once discursive and affective, which is proper to his state.

The third life is that of the spiritual man. To him belongs contemplation, which begins by *supernatural recollection* (ch. iii, 2), very different from natural or acquired recollection—*natural y adquisito*—which is obtained by the efforts of the soul. Supernatural recollection is a gift of God which operates in the higher portion of the soul. It is into this higher part that God pours the supernatural graces which he accords to his friends (ch. iii, 9). Lastly, the author describes the

[1] If these quotations had been authentic, Père Poulain would not have failed to produce them; now, he has not given us a single one.

supernatural prayers of silence, quiet and union. He does not, then, recognise any acquired contemplation.

5. *Exact doctrine but inaccurate terms of certain more experienced authors: Boudon, Père de Clorivière.*

141. At the same epoch, other writers, who certainly had personal experience of contemplative prayer, give very exact descriptions of it, and if, like their contemporaries, they admit acquired contemplation, it is in reality the mystical state which they designate by that name. This is the case with Boudon, the celebrated archdeacon of Evreux (1624-1702); in his work, *The Reign of God in Prayer*, Book I, he admits an active[1] contemplation which he divides into two kinds, "one of which is made with several distinct notions, and another which is practised with a simple, confused view, with scarcely any particular knowledge" (Book I, ch. viii). He merely mentions the first kind without even describing it; he dwells at length on the second, and calls it the prayer of faith.

In this prayer "God is regarded neither by affirmation nor negation, nor in any particular aspect. but as an universal object raised above all created knowledge and capacity" (ch. xv and xviii). "It is a simple remembrance of God, who is believed in bare faith, without images and without consideration of distinct objects, and the operation of the will is conformable to that of the understanding, that is to say, it is bare and simple. . . . Advanced persons who have this *attraction* may practise it with benediction. . . . There are some who are ATTRACTED *sweetly* although imperceptibly, but they feel a kind of foundation of faith in the presence of God, without being able to discern it, which holds them *in sweetness, and in peace*. There are others whom God calls by a *complete inability to meditate*, by dryness and distractions, by painful privations, by suffering horrible temptations, and it is to such that a great Prelate[2] addresses these words: 'Unite yourselves to

[1] He also calls it acquired (Book I, ch. xv), but he usually says active.

[2] Mgr. Camus, Bishop of Belley.

God without discourse . . . in a profound and universal silence'" (ch. xv). Does not all this accord with the teaching of St John of the Cross? Besides, Boudon here invokes his authority. But, with reason, the Saint attributes this attraction, this peace and sweetness, this inability to meditate, to mystical graces. He sees in this prayer, as we have said before (Nos. 61 and 62), a supernatural but not extraordinary state.

This prayer which is practised in the centre of the soul "is that of the contemplative who reposes in God by the prayer of a simple faith, without image and without reflection, in entire abandonment to all that God wills of him, wishing nothing and desiring nothing of himself. As on the summit of a mountain a purer air is breathed, and the light is not darkened by any cloud or fog, so the contemplative in the centre of his soul breathes an air of grace which no temptation[1] can disturb; he possesses the God of all light, whom nothing can take from him. It is in this centre that he tastes that peace which passes all sentiment. . . . The dwelling of the contemplative is in peace, and peace dwells continually in the summit of his soul. . . . The exercise of faith is founded on a spiritual light, that is, he must only love and take complacency in the Divine Being, more present to us than we are to ourselves. . . . This light is easily preserved, not being dependent on the corporal organs,[2] so subject to weariness, nor even occupying the powers of the soul, neither the intellect,[3] nor the will hindering the conversations and affairs

[1] Not that it is sheltered from temptations, but they remain in the inferior part of the soul, and do not destroy its peace, which is in the superior part.

[2] The emotions or sensible sweetness have not, indeed, any influence on it, and it exists equally well in aridity.

[3] In the preceding chapter, the author has distinguished the intelligence, which he here calls the intellect, which knows by a simple view, without discourse, from the understanding, which proceeds by reasoning. He would say, then, that this light of faith, this thought of God, simple and without reflection, being in the summit of the mind, and not in that portion in which reflections take place, the latter do not destroy it; the soul may reason, reflect, be occupied, without losing either that simple view of faith, or the disposition of love which accompanies it and which resides in the will.

which present themselves, in such fashion that in almost all sorts of occurrences the soul is assisted by this ray which offers itself, and strikes her eyes, without hindering the rest of her powers, and even giving her light to guide them aright" (ch. xviii).

This prayer is not yet that which Boudon calls passive, of which he only speaks further on (ch. xx); it is, however, quite unmistakably a mystical state. Is not what he has said on the last lines we have quoted a very good explanation of a striking phenomenon, pointed out in two passages[1] by St Teresa, the persistence of the mystical state amidst the labours and occupations of life?

142. Perhaps it will be said: "What does it matter if mystical prayer is not called by its proper name, since its existence is fully admitted?" But those who admit it and who invite souls to tend to it are but few in number; the rest attach little importance to these states of prayer, which are described to them by new names. As they do not recognise in them the contemplation which had enjoyed so great an esteem during so many centuries, they become more and more persuaded that this latter is a kind of prayer altogether rare and extraordinary and, so to speak, inaccessible. Thus the rules given by the masters for mystical prayer were regarded as useless, as belonging only to altogether exceptional souls, and their books, so wise and so practical, were often considered even dangerous for the greater number of pious souls.

143. When Père de Clorivière in 1778 submitted to examination his short but very remarkable *Manuel sur la Prière et l'Oraison*, censors deliberated whether it was opportune to publish that portion which concerned the different degrees of passive prayer. Père de Clorivière made the remark that, "according to the testimony of St Teresa, a considerable number of souls are called by God to passive prayer, at least to those degrees commonly called ordinary" (Preface, p. 1). In the end the work was not printed. This was only

[1] *Life*, ch. xvii, p. 124, and *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxxi, p. 145. Cp. Lallemant, *Doctrine spirituelle*, VII, Princ., ch. iv, a. 3, § 3.

done during the early years of the nineteenth century. Yet it did not clash with the opinions then in vogue.[1] Like Boudon, he placed passive prayer farther off than the masters had put contemplation. Thus he describes very well, as one having personal experience, the trial which St John of the Cross calls the night of the senses, and he points out what signs should be recognised before quitting the path of reasoning to enter into a prayer which he calls that of simple regard and recollection. These signs correspond well with those given by St John of the Cross, and the prayer of simple regard to that named by the great mystic, contemplation. But for Père de Clorivière, it is not yet passive prayer. Farther on, wishing to determine the specific difference between the prayer of quiet, qualified by him as passive, and the prayer of simple regard, he indicates merely a difference of degree. "Passive recollection," he says, "which the Lord operates in the soul without any assistance from the understanding and the will, unless by their acquiescence, this recollection, I say, which was only passing[2] in the preceding state (prayer of simple regard), becomes habitual in the prayer of quiet" (ch. xxxiii). It is then only a difference of continuity. Evidently, it would have been more exact, it was even necessary to conclude, since the same element is present in each case, that it is the same kind of prayer, one being less pronounced, an initial state, the other more advanced and more perfect.

6. *The prayer of simplicity described by Bossuet is a mystical prayer.*

144. Père de Clorivière bases what he says of the prayer of recollection on the teaching of Bossuet; other authors also invoke his authority to prove that there is

[1] He even conformed to them concerning the desire of passive prayer (ch. xxxii), so great was the credit then given to the doctrine of Rodriguez and Scaramelli condemning the desire of contemplation, a doctrine so contrary nevertheless to the teaching of the masters.

[2] And yet, according to this author, strong enough to arrest natural activity and keep the soul in loving silence.

another contemplation distinct from that which is mystical; it will not be without profit to examine the truth of this assertion.

In a celebrated opuscule Bossuet has given, indeed, the description of a prayer which he calls of "simplicity and the simple presence of God." This description is remarkable for its exactitude; it is evident that Bossuet had observed very closely souls to whom this prayer was familiar. In it he recognises the presence of elements which are not met with in inferior degrees of prayer; first, a particular attraction of grace leading the soul away from meditation and conducting her to contemplation; then a particular action of the Holy Spirit communicating lights and virtues.

"Grace solicits interiorly those who would become perfect to simplify themselves that they may become capable of enjoying the one thing necessary—that is, eternal unity. . . . Meditation is very good in its time and very useful at the beginning of the spiritual life, but we must not stop at it, since the soul, by its fidelity to mortification and recollection, usually *receives* a purer and more interior form of prayer which may be called the prayer of simplicity. This consists in a simple interior view, regard, or loving attention towards some divine object, either God in himself or some of his perfections, or Jesus Christ or some of his mysteries or other Christian verities. Then the soul, abandoning all reasoning, falls into a sweet contemplation which keeps her in peace, attentive and *susceptible to the divine operations and impressions which are communicated to her by the Holy Spirit. She does little and receives much;* her labour is sweet, yet more fruitful, and as she approaches nearer to the source of all *light*, of all grace and of all virtue, she also *receives of these in greater abundance.* God becomes the only master of her interior, *and operates there more particularly* than hitherto he was wont to do. *The less the creature labours, the more powerfully does God work*, and since the operation of God is a repose, the soul becomes in a certain manner like unto him in this prayer, and *receives also marvellous effects.* As the rays of the sun cause

the plants to grow, to flower and to bring forth fruit, so the soul which is exposed to the rays of the divine Sun of Justice more effectually imbibes the divine influences which enrich it with every kind of virtue. . . . *This same light of faith which keeps us attentive to God will cause us to discover our slightest imperfections*, and conceive for them a deep displeasure and regret," etc.

145. Certainly the contemplation here described ought to be called neither active nor acquired;[1] it is a gift of God and a very precious gift. Bossuet had observed very carefully that phenomenon of the spiritual life, the passage from meditation to contemplation. If we read again St John of the Cross, we shall notice the perfect conformity of the two doctrines.

In the eyes of St John of the Cross, that prayer which thus succeeds meditation in well-disposed souls and procures for them such precious lights, is truly supernatural and mystical prayer. Does Bossuet recognise this? The false idea he adopted of the mystical or passive state—for he assimilates these terms[2]—in which he saw an absolute inability of reflection, made him hesitate. He wrote, indeed, to Mme. de Maisonfort: "I am quite persuaded that in giving ourselves up to faith alone, which of its own nature is neither discursive nor reasoning, we can forsake discourse without *being unable to make it. I will not assert that a soul is then in a state of passive prayer*, as it is called by B. John of the Cross," etc. But there is no possible doubt it is indeed the entrance into the mystical state which has been so well described by the great Bishop of Meaux.

[1] It is acquired in this sense, that it is obtained "by fidelity to mortification and recollection," but the majority of the authors who employ the term "acquired" in speaking of contemplation take it in another sense. By acquired contemplation they understand a contemplation which can be reached by our own efforts, by concentrating and maintaining the attention of the soul on one single truth. It is manifest that the prayer here described by Bossuet is altogether different.

[2] *Instruct. sur les États d'or*, Book VII.

CHAPTER XIII

THE UNITIVE WAY

1. *The words mystical way, contemplative way, unitive way, perfect way, designate the same state.*

146. In the teaching of the masters, according to our exposition of it, there is a perfect harmony. From the idea of the mystical state conceived by them, it is natural to conclude that it is the term and the aim of all spiritual life. He who wishes to give himself to the service of God ought to begin by searching into the truths of the faith, he ought to apply himself by serious meditation to know the grandeurs of God, his benefits, and his love; to know himself, his miseries, his needs, to acquaint himself with his duties, and the reward of virtue. He does this in the first place in the midst of painful conflicts, caused by his evil inclinations, conflicts in which victories are obtained with difficulty and defeats are frequent. This is the purgative way, or the state of beginners.

If he is faithful, evil inclinations lose their power, the worldly ideas, the earthly thoughts which filled his mind are dispersed; the truths which are preached to him or which he learns from books and which he searches into in his meditations, appear to him clearer, more evident. The benefits of God, the love of our Lord who suffered so much for him, touch him more deeply, virtue becomes easier, and as he understands better its charms and its necessity, he prays fervently to obtain it: this is the illuminative way.

147. But up to now this faithful Christian has not yet, or rather very seldom and in small measure, received those superior lights which show the truths of faith under a new aspect, which especially communicate the true knowledge of God: hitherto he was not properly disposed for their reception. When, by his fidelity to recol-

lection, by the generous and constant practice of renunciation, he has been able to repress these solicitudes and these vain preoccupations, these capricious and changing pictures of an imagination always at work, these natural desires, these human wishes, which are so many obstacles to divine union, then God pours into his soul higher graces. He enlightens his understanding, making him comprehend confusedly, but with profound conviction, how incomprehensible are his infinite perfections, how sweet and all-absorbing his loveliness. Above all, he acts upon the will, and the faithful soul then, without grasping the manner of it, sees herself strongly attracted towards her God. Here is the presence of mystical graces, which do not indeed act in a precise and determined manner, as in the way of reflections, but by a secret and mysterious process. At the same time that he enlightens and enkindles the soul, the Holy Spirit sustains her by the gift of fortitude.

148. Under the influence of these graces, prayer takes a new form: the soul no longer reasons as heretofore, she goes straight to God, who is known better and who attracts with power and sweetness. She takes no delight save in thinking of him, seeing him in himself, or seeing herself close to him, regarding him and, above all, loving him. To unite herself to God, or remain in the state of union, this is the only ambition of this faithful soul, and in it lies all her happiness. Here is contemplation, here is perfect union. the only union which perfectly merits the name. Indeed, the union of the soul with God is effected through knowledge and love (see above, No. 71); now it is in contemplation especially that the soul, illuminated by clear lights, enkindled by a perfect love, is truly united with God. When these mystical graces are communicated, not at intervals and from time to time, but frequently and as if habitually, the soul continuing to be united to God even out of the time of prayer and in the midst of her occupations, she is in the contemplative or unitive way.

149. It is easy to understand that God does not usually accord gifts so precious save to persons already advanced in the way of detachment. Others can only receive them

exceptionally, because they place too many obstacles to their reception. Besides, these graces being also graces of love, they cause love continually to increase, so much so that those who are thus favoured reach the point of having no other will than the will of God; they have thus reached the state of perfection. Those, on the contrary, who do not enjoy these lights, whose hearts are not inflamed with this infused charity, remain in a much lower state. This is why holy writers assure us that if a soul possesses perfect virtue, it is the surest sign that she has received the eminent graces of contemplation.

Is it possible for God so to fortify the faithful soul as to render her perfect without according her any graces outside the common way; by his light to aid her in meditation, by his inspirations to sustain her will, excite her to virtue, and carry her on in the way of love, both the one and the other being exercised as in the ordinary actions of life? Assuredly, he could do so. The soul would be transformed, her faculties would become much more powerful. Her intellect becoming more penetrating, her will acquiring greater energy, these would be capable of producing perfect acts, not merely from time to time, but habitually. The soul would be in the state of perfection without being in the mystical state.

Experience proves that God does not thus change human nature, he leaves it in its miseries, even in the Saints. These latter are conscious of an action of God, which, partially suspending their natural activity, enlightens their understanding without the aid of discourse, and sustains their will, or urges it on towards good, filling it with love after a manner at once strong, sweet, and delightful, which is not that of mere human activity. At the same time also that they see themselves thus enlightened, fortified and enkindled by God, they feel intensely both the narrowness of their intellect and the weakness of their will;[1] humility seems to them quite natural.

[1] It is true that their will has become stronger than is that of beginners or even proficients, but it is still much too weak to be able to maintain itself in the state of perfection with only the succour of common grace.

In periods of aridity, disgust, impotence, when they are not sensible of the action of the Holy Spirit, they recognise even more clearly than usual that their fidelity to duty is not the fruit of their own activity. In fact, the reflections by which they then try to arouse themselves scarcely move them at all, and their will remains weak. Nevertheless, they always retain a very high notion of God; they are constantly in the will to please him and him alone. They recoil before no sacrifice, they endure without flinching the most cruel trials, the most terrible desolations, the most persistent temptations. Feeling themselves so feeble and yet finding themselves so faithful, it appears to them quite natural to recognise that God has made himself their fortitude and their refuge.[1]

It seems as if it were more in conformity with the wisdom of God to make heroes of virtue out of beings who remain naturally weak, by the aid of superhuman graces. May we not recall here the words of St Paul: *Infirma mundi elegit Deus ut confundat fortia:* God chooses infirmity in order to confound strength.

Thus, when we say that mystical graces are necessary to perfection, we are reckoning with the ordinary designs of Providence. We are considering man as he is, not as he might be.[2]

The mystical state, then, is that in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit are exercised not now rarely and in passing, but habitually. We include not only the gifts of understanding and wisdom, which give an eminent knowledge and "taste" of God, and the gift of knowledge, which enlightens the soul as to its own poverty and the nothingness of creatures, but also the gift of fortitude, which gives her a great courage in surmounting obstacles to the practice of the virtues, and the gift of counsel which

[1] There are, certainly, men in whom we see a great energy of will, but even in them this energy is mingled with weakness; its scope is limited. Ardent, tenacious, often to the point of obstinacy, when they pursue their desires, in many circumstances they show themselves very weak.

[2] Père Poulain (*Grâc. d'or,* Bibl. No. 140) has written that "no one will accept the proposition" which serves as title to this chapter. This strange assertion only goes to show to what point, even of late years, the traditional doctrine is still unknown or misunderstood.

inspires her with numerous wise decisions. If the soul had worked out these decisions by the virtue of prudence, she would only have reached them painfully, slowly, doubtfully, and sometimes they are even contrary to what her own feeble lights would suggest. The gift of piety, which makes us love God with a truly filial love, the gift of fear, which makes us dread above all things to displease him, these also are frequently brought into exercise in the mystical state.

150. Hence we understand why, during so many centuries, spiritual authors have assimilated the mystical way, the contemplative way, the unitive way and perfection. For them, it is the same state under different names. That such is their doctrine it would be easy to bring forward many proofs, but we have already adduced them in another work. The unitive way is acknowledged by all to be the way of the perfect, the supreme degree, the end towards which pious souls ought to tend; but all acknowledge also that contemplation is truly the normal term of the spiritual life, it is the quite legitimate object of the aspirations of the faithful soul, the prayer of the perfect. Finally, according to all the masters, it is the only means of attaining to union with God.[1]

2. *Testimony of St John of the Cross, Suarez, John of Jesus and Mary, Bona, etc.*

151. Read, for example, St John of the Cross, who has exposed the traditional doctrine in so precise and didactic a manner. His work is full of this teaching, and so numerous are the passages in which it is set forth that we cannot transcribe them all. Let this one suffice:

"Souls begin to enter into the dark night when God brings them out of the state of beginners, for beginners are those who advance in the spiritual road by the path of meditation. God brings these souls, then, into the

[1] Let the reader, in order to convince himself, be so good as to take the analytical table in *Vie d'Union* and notice the numerous passages there indicated as expressing these doctrines.

state of advanced persons, which is already the state of contemplatives. He wishes by this means to bring them to the state of the perfect, which is the state of divine union" (*Dark Night*, Book I, ch. i, p. 6). Thus, beginners meditate, advanced persons begin to enter into contemplation,[1] the perfect are in the state of habitual contemplation and divine union. According to him again—we have quoted the passage (No. 62)—it is the light of contemplation which "raises the soul to the state of perfection." The object which the Saint puts before himself in his earlier works, the *Ascent of Carmel* and the *Dark Night*, is, he often repeats, to teach us how to scale the mountain of perfection,[2] to attain divine

[1] The Saint declares this expressly elsewhere (*Ascent*, Book II, ch. xiii, p. 163), showing how proficients are in an intermediate state, in which meditation is mingled with contemplation. Other writers attribute affective prayer to the advanced; this doctrine appears to us correct, and we have followed it in the *Degrees of the Spiritual Life*. This does not contradict St John of the Cross, for souls are in affective prayer when they begin to receive contemplative graces. It is thus the classical division which we have adopted (*Degrees*, Book II, ch. iii, a. 1, § 2). We take this occasion to protest against a doctrine attributed to us by Père Poulain in his first edition, according to which there would be seven degrees of prayer corresponding to the seven states of virtue traced out by St Teresa in her *Mansions*. *We have never written one word in favour of such a classification.* Still more astonishing, the same author affirms that the *Seven Mansions* of St Teresa are states of prayer. As to each "Mansion" the Saint assigns a progress in virtue, it would follow that this doctrine, which he erroneously attributes to us, and justly combats, would be that of St Teresa herself. But by "Mansion" the Saint does not mean a state of prayer. Indeed, what are the states of prayer described in the first three "Mansions"? As for the *Fifth*, we have shown above (No. 40) how she in no wise identifies it with the prayer of union. Similarly, the *Sixth Mansion* is not ecstasy, for in it terrible pain, interior and exterior, may be experienced. Besides, the Saint says that raptures occur frequently in this *Mansion;* they do not therefore constitute it. Finally, still following St Teresa, the soul has ecstasies, though less frequently, in the *Seventh Mansion*. Mgr. Farges, on this point as on many others, has followed Père Poulain.

[2] *Ascent*, Exposition of the Subject, Prologue I, 1, 5, 13; II, 1. *Night*, Exposition of the Subject. How, then, can it be said and repeated, against all evidence, that his books only concern persons led by exceptional ways? It is because he rests everything on contemplation, and they regard contemplation as a favour outside the common way.

union,[1] to the transformation of the soul in God;[2] for him these are but one. All readers of St John of the Cross know that the foundation of his whole teaching is this, that divine union is effected by contemplation. For him, then, the unitive way and the contemplative way are but one.

We need not necessarily believe that by the union of the soul with God the holy author means that supreme degree of union which he calls the spiritual marriage. No, he distinguishes very clearly and in several passages this supreme and exceptional union from that which he names the common or ordinary union (*Living Flame*, str. i, verse 3, p. 396). He recognises that there are many degrees of union with God according to the capacity of each one, and although all those who have reached by union to the state of perfection find in it satisfaction and peace, yet they are far from being all equal in perfection (*Ascent*, II, ch. iv, p. 115). To attain to the inferior degrees, which are the ordinary state, it is not necessary to pass through the terrible purgations reserved for chosen souls (*Night*, Book II, ch. xii, p. 52; and Book II, ch. i, p. 90).

152. Another witness to the traditional doctrine may be found in Suarez. Now Suarez places no difference between the unitive way and the contemplative way; he employs indifferently the two terms *via unitiva sive contemplativa*.

"When the soul," says Denis the Carthusian, "has been reformed in its sensitive appetites, and illuminated in its spirit, it is ready for the third way, which is called perfective or unitive, and consists in this: The contemplation of divine things inflames it with love; wholly enkindled by a spark of divine fire, it is raised above all that is created, it forsakes all things, and, oblivious of itself as of the rest of creatures, it sees itself, in full liberty, sincerity, and integrity, taken up, liquefied, transformed and absorbed in God by means of the burn-

[1] *Ascent*, Exposition of the Subject, Prologue I, 2, 3, 4, 5, 13; II, 1, 4, 5. Edic. critica, pp. 27, 29, 38, 43, 44, 45, 51, 90, 95, 99, 106, 107, 108, 111, 112, 150.

[2] *Ascent*, I, 4; II, 1, 4, 15. Edic. crit., pp. 45, 48, 51, 106, and 165.

ing love which it feels for him. Such is the unitive way, in which the soul is united to God in a manner very intimate and supernatural; it is the mystical theology described by the great Denis" (*De Contemplatione*, Book I, ch. i, c. 19).

153. In John of Jesus and Mary the same teaching is found. After giving the classical description of the states of beginners and proficients, and after declaring that the former are in the purgative way and the latter in the illuminative, he says: "The third way (that of the perfect) is what is called the unitive way; it is that of Mary, who chose the better part. In the unitive way, the spirit being purified, the soul contemplates divine things and is united to God by a mysterious union; she enjoys a peace which is above all feeling and tastes a most pure pleasure. . . . The active life covers the first two ways; it destroys vices, represses the passions, which is the business of beginners; it augments virtues, which is proper to proficients. . . . The contemplative life, rich already (in merits) and adorned (with virtues), comprises the third way, which is the sublime way. . . . Thus the purgative and illuminative ways correspond to the active life, the unitive way to the contemplative life. . . .

"Hence it is easy to conclude to which degree of charity, to which state mystical theology belongs. As it is that eminent knowledge of God, obtained by divine union, it is clear that it belongs to the third state, to that way in which contemplation has become familiar" (*Theol. Myst.*, c. 2).

Half a century later the illustrious Cardinal Bona (1609-1672) teaches the same doctrine almost in the same words,[1] adding again: "The purgative way purifies and perfects the sensible nature, the illuminative that of reason, and the unitive the spirit or understanding, which is the superior part of the soul," that in which mystical authors place contemplative operations.

[1] *Cum vita spiritualis duplex sit, activa et contemplativa*—he says elsewhere (cap. II) *activa et passiva—ad activam duo priores status* (*incipientium et proficientium*) *pertinent; tertius* (*perfectorum*) *ad contemplativam* (*Via compendii ad Deum*, ch. viii, No. 6).

154. Finally, at the end of the seventeenth century, a well-known Jesuit, Père Jean Crasset (1618-1692), gives a beautiful exposition of this truly traditional doctrine.[1]

"The soul *arrives at divine union*, and at the nuptials of the Lamb by three operations, by meditation, by affection, and by contemplation. Meditation instructs the mind, affection warms the heart, *contemplation unites the soul with God*. Meditation purges it of its vices and errors, affection inflames it, and causes it to practise good works, contemplation elevates it, and introduces it into the chamber of the Spouse. Meditation is for beginners, affection is for those who are advancing, contemplation is for the perfect. In meditation the mind seeks, in affection the heart desires, in contemplation the soul finds what it sought, and enjoys what it desired. The mind works in meditation, the heart aspires in affection, both of these repose in contemplation. Thus, *divine union is an enjoyment of God*, whom the soul has sought by meditation, whom she has attracted by affection, and *whom she has found by contemplation*."

155. As long as the mystical and contemplative state was understood in the way we have explained, this doctrine was universally accepted, and the writers who treat of it up to the seventeenth century enter into no discussions, meet with no contradiction. They would have been greatly astonished at the idea of distinguishing two unitive ways totally different from one another. They would have been still more surprised had they been told that the unitive way without mystical graces was the common and ordinary way, and the unitive way accompanied by contemplation was a way extraordinary and exceptional.

3. *Novel conception of the Mystical State and duplication of the unitive way.*

156. About this epoch the notion of the mystical state became profoundly modified. We have said above (No. 114) how, from the beginning of the sixteenth cen-

[1] *Considerations on the Principal Actions of a Christian*, Consid. xiv.

tury, a deplorable deviation had begun to appear in the teaching of mystical doctrine; but by the end of the seventeenth century, the deviation from the true doctrine was still more marked. According to Bossuet's conception of the mystical state, it was a state truly miraculous, God reducing the soul to an *absolute* inability to reason. He also assures us that the mystical state, in which, as he says, "there neither is nor can be any merit," adds nothing to the perfection of him who receives it. And, to prove it, he alleges a passage from St Teresa which affirms this principle, *not of the mystical state*, but of our Lord's apparitions! (*Instr. sur les États d'oraison*).

157. Honorius of St Mary professes the same doctrine. "This is what is called infused contemplation, passive and supernatural, otherwise extraordinary prayer; for it all comes to the same thing, since, by the suppression of every act of discourse and effort of our own, all that is according to our own manner of acting, we are moved in a marvellous manner by an extraordinary assistance from the Holy Ghost" (Part III, Dissert. 3, art. 1). Starting with this notion, he is led to analogous conclusions, he distinguishes two kinds of union, very different from one another, the common way and the mystical way; and he establishes the thesis that perfection consists essentially in the union of the ordinary way, which is for him the non-mystical way (*ibid.*, Dissert. 6, art. 2, § 2).

But when it comes to the question of supporting this doctrine by authority, this writer, though so erudite, only brings forward certain passages to which he assigns an interpretation manifestly erroneous. St Bernard declares that many wish to enjoy here below an absolute repose, exempt from all pains and labours, but only on leaving this world will they enjoy this complete peace.[1] Honorius of St Mary understands by this absolute repose the *mystical state* (!), and he concludes that, according to St Bernard, even very perfect souls will never arrive at mystical union here below!

[1] See the doctrine of St Bernard in the *Vie d'Union*. The passage quoted will be found in Article 166.

St Gregory says that contemplation is accorded to persons of high dignity equally with people of humble condition, more often to persons retired from the world, sometimes even to the married. *Saepe hanc (contemplationis gratiam) summi, saepe minimi, saepius remoti, aliquando etiam conjungati percipiunt.* Honorius[1] understands *summi* of the perfect, *minimi* of those little advanced, *remoti* "of those who seem less well-disposed for it"; these are they, according to his interpretation, who most often receive the grace of contemplation! It is difficult to see why St Gregory mentions here married persons! And this is one proof more that contemplation has no relationship with perfection!

The same author alleges again the passage from St. Teresa to which we have several times alluded (*supra*, Nos. 40, 116, and 117), in which the Saint declares that *ecstatic* union, not mystical union, is not indispensable and ought not to be desired. It is true that, according to the way in which he understands mystical union, it scarcely differs from ecstatic union; he even goes so far as to assimilate the two. "We ought to ask of God to be united to him . . . it is in this union that all our happiness consists in this life. It is not the same with mystical or ecstatic union, which cannot, according to the theologians,[2] be asked of God without presumption and exposing ourselves to illusion.

Finally, he refers us to certain writers who teach that God often accords the grace of contemplation to the imperfect. That he does so sometimes, all agree; that he does so frequently, the authors quoted do not say. "Grace," says Cassian in the passage referred to,[3] "does not disdain *sometimes* to visit the tepid and negligent, and to pour into their souls these inspirations and this abundance of holy thoughts of which you speak." How did Honorius see here a proof that *contemplation*

[1] Anthony of the Holy Ghost in 1677, in his *Directorium mysticum* (Tr. III., disp. iii, § 6), had already quoted in this sense this passage of the holy doctor, but it seems that he did not dare to develop his thought.

[2] We do not know to which writers of his time, forgotten to-day, he alludes.

[3] *Conf.*, IV, No. 5.

is *often* accorded to the imperfect; how could he refer to this passage to demonstrate that mystical union is superfetation, and that it is non-mystical union which constitutes perfection?

158. It must, indeed, be recognised that proofs are wanting to establish a duplication of the unitive way; but contemplation, the mystical state, has been changed into an altogether extraordinary gift; it is depicted in such colours that it can only be recognised in ecstatics. Hence, as numberless souls do arrive at perfection, and consequently the unitive way, without receiving such sublime favours, it was necessary to conclude that there is a unitive or perfect way without contemplation. Thus a bifurcation of the unitive way must be admitted. This is logical, but it ceases to be in accordance with traditional doctrine.

CHAPTER XIV

DESCRIPTION AND PSYCHOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE MYSTICAL STATE

We have established the principles: it will now be easy to describe mystical operations *as they are revealed by experience* and to analyse the elements therein discovered.

1. *The entrance into the mystical state.*

159. When a faithful soul has applied herself generously for some length of time to pious practices; when in her prayer she has tasted the sweet emotions, the tender impulses of nascent piety; when she has made serious efforts to recollect, conquer, and mortify herself, a change takes place in her at which she is astonished. I now no longer experience, she says, that which I used to feel: prayer, meditation, holy communion itself does not inspire me with the same sentiments as heretofore. I am now in some sort insensible, the considerations which used to move me do so no longer, and the distractions which invade my mind are more difficult to repulse.

Yet this soul has diminished none of her generous efforts; dissipation and immortification often produce analogous effects in less fervent persons, but in the case we are supposing there has been always the same generosity in recollection and self-abnegation. So long as there is no abuse of grace, so long as grace is not refused, it does not diminish, it even grows; it has not become less abundant or less strong in this faithful soul, but it no longer acts in the same manner.

It is a crisis in the spiritual life, painful but salutary according to the divine plan, most salutary indeed if we know how to utilise it. On the issue of this crisis

the whole future of our spiritual life often depends. We have only to speak here of those who during this trial yield nothing to relaxation.[1] Following the advice given them, these generous Christians accept and bless the divine will; they praise its wisdom without altogether understanding its ways; they proclaim its goodness even while it makes them suffer. These are the dispositions which should be recommended to them, the acts which they should force themselves to make and to reiterate in the midst of their dryness in prayer and holy communion.

Then, and often very rapidly[2] if their generosity is great and their conformity to the divine will entire, the change is accentuated, new operations of divine grace become manifest. First, there is a secret and almost continual attraction towards God: in the midst of their day's business their heart ever aspires to him, the desire of loving him and of pleasing him frequently returns and animates all their actions; they feel themselves drawn to prayer, they go to the foot of the Tabernacle with joy and eagerness, they avoid useless conversations, and delight in solitude, where they hope to find God. In their time of prayer they are content, and taste a great peace. If it must be interrupted they suffer, and it costs them much to tear themselves away from God. Yet the sweet emotions, the sensible consolations of former times, are no longer experienced.

[1] We have shown elsewhere (*Degrees*, Book III, Pt. I, ch. iii, and Book IV, ch. iii) how others do not progress or even do not maintain their ground in the mystical state; they may receive some mystical graces, but these are weak and transitory, and therefore difficult to discern. Besides, even those who are more advanced in the mystical way are very often not aware of it. They do not know that the feelings they experience and even their impotency and interior trials belong to the mystical way.

[2] We must say that exceptions are met with, even in generous souls, when these are overwhelmed with occupations and when recollection is difficult for them, and especially when they have not been trained to the interior life and do not understand its necessity. How immense is the advantage of those who have learnt the value of intimate union with God, and who have been taught how to obtain it! Amongst such souls, a much greater number of contemplatives is found.

2. *Action of God on the higher portions of the understanding and will.*

160. What, then, is taking place? God is acting directly on the higher portion of the will; it is he himself who is pouring love into it, since it is no longer by arousing itself or by reflecting that it is obtained. The attraction towards God is the sign of this love: we are drawn towards the object of our love. Adhesion to the divine will is one of its acts; the profound contentment of our own will is one of its effects; it is because we love him that we are so well satisfied to be with him. This love, which is not born of considerations, is yet most reasonable: we know whom we love, we know that the beloved Being is a thousand times worthy of this love. It is also a pure love, founded on the incomprehensible perfections of the Beloved, perfections which we do not particularise, which are grasped in a manner general and confused, but which penetrate us deeply. It is a perfectly free love[1]; although it has been received and not acquired by our own efforts, yet it is none the less freely accepted; we may even be said to have but one desire, that of seeing it still more augmented.

161. It is not without good reason that spiritual writers attribute mystical operations to the higher portions of the soul. Indeed, those who are in this state often remark in themselves a curious phenomenon. At those very moments when they are experiencing this powerful attraction, this profound peace, this union of their heart with God, operations of another kind take place in them. Either the imagination continues its wanderings, or else their mind works and reflects, or perhaps they are given up to some occupation which solicits some attention; they may even experience painful temptations.[2] We

[1] While being absolutely free, the acts of love which are made in this state are for the most part very rapid, not reflex, often even unperceived; these are direct acts. We have explained the meaning of direct acts. *Degrees,* Book V, Pt. I, ch. iv, 2.

[2] St Francis de Sales has clearly noted this strange simultaneous presence of contemplative phenomena and the vagaries of the imagination. St Teresa used strongly to advise mystical souls not to trouble themselves about it (see *Degrees,* Vol. II, Nos. 53, 54, 166).

call the "inferior portion" of the soul, that wherein are seated sensible perceptions and the movements of the sensitive appetite, that portion also wherein reason acts, making use of the data furnished to it by the exterior and interior senses; it is the battleground of the greater part of our temptations. The middle part of the soul is that in which take place the more noble acts of the reason, reflections on things moral and spiritual, calculations, the search for beauty, utility, truth, and the acts of the will which these produce. It is in this part that we must place meditation, resolutions taken at the end of reflections inspired by faith, the acts of contrition and of love which the faithful soul strives to produce. But it is not in this middle portion that mystical acts take place, since they can co-exist, and indeed often do co-exist, with operations which are totally different, and have their seat in the part we are speaking of. Mystical operations are more elevated, and that is why they are attributed, according to the generally received term, to the summit of the understanding, to the highest point of the will.

3. *The part played by the inferior portion during mystical operations.*

162. It is because mystical acts take place in the highest portion of the soul that, often enough, the inferior or sensible appetite plays no part in them. It is less a stranger to the operations of reason than to mystical operations. It may happen, it is true, that determinations, firm resolutions, may be taken by the will without sensible emotion, but when intellectual joys of a deep nature are experienced, there is usually a repercussion in the inferior appetite; mystical joys, on the contrary strong and profound, often exist without sensible effect.

"God favours me," writes St Francis de Sales, "with many consolations and holy affections by means of the illuminations and feelings which he bestows on the supreme part of my soul, the inferior portion having

no share in them." Bossuet, who quoted these words,[1] sees in them a proof that the Saint was not in the mystical state. He did not, indeed, experience that *absolute* inability to reason which, according to Bossuet, is one of the characteristics of the mystical state. We, on the contrary, see in these words a proof that he was in the mystical state.

163. It may also happen that the inferior part may be in opposition to the higher. "I experience attractions so strong," wrote St Margaret Mary, "that my breast seems to be pierced with sharp knives, which often takes from me the power to breathe . . . my heart suffering with my Jesus, and my spirit rejoicing in his love. But here, the inferior part gains nothing, because it neither sees nor knows anything of what is passing in the superior portion of my soul, which forgets itself, and has no desire but to unite and lose itself in God."

The opposition between the different faculties of the soul was, then, very much accentuated in the holy nun of the Visitation. It is often thus with the Saints, both because their feelings of love, which are in the supreme part, are very intense, and because their interior trials are at the same time very severe, their repugnances and the revolts of the lower nature very violent. God treats these valiant souls harshly, to purify and sanctify them more thoroughly.

In those who, although in the mystical state, have not attained to this degree of heroism, the same phenomenon, though less sensible, is often met with. In the midst of their sufferings and even of their anxieties, they taste in themselves a profound peace; this peace is not acquired, not of natural origin, for then it would exclude all disquiet, but God himself pours it into their souls.

164. Sensible nature is not always thus at war with the higher nature; neither does it always observe that neutrality which we have observed in St Francis de

[1] *Instr. sur les états d'oraison*, Book IX. Cp. the deposition of St Jane de Chantal for the canonisation of St Francis de Sales, art. 33, and letter from the same Saint to Dom Jean de St François on the virtues of St Francis de Sales.

Sales. Often enough, on the contrary, the sensitive appetite, following the movements of the will, which delights in love, is stirred, sometimes slightly, sometimes profoundly. In the latter case it enjoys real delights, tenderness most delicate and strong. When in the mystic state this "relish" is experienced, it is much easier to "taste" union with God amid labours and various occupations, even without having reached a very high degree of contemplation.

The imagination does not seem to be of much assistance in the mystical state; it is, on the contrary, almost always a source of distractions. But in picturing to ourselves scenes from the Gospel narrative, and especially the Passion, we can hinder it from causing painful disquietude, we can direct it towards the Beloved, we can even utilise it to increase recollection and infused love, though it may be only by removing obstacles.[1]

4. *Part played by the intermediate powers.*

165. As to that which we have called the middle part of the soul, it may either hinder or favour mystical operations. It hinders without altogether destroying them when involuntary preoccupations, which we do not altogether succeed in repulsing, retain a part of our attention. We see then that our soul is united to God, and we suffer from the incompleteness of this union; yet it is not always in our power to unite ourselves more closely.

166. Sometimes it is not merely distracting preoccupations, but very distressing thoughts which invade this middle part of the soul and cause there great affliction; peace is no longer to be found except in the higher region.

"Whilst I was interiorly waiting upon my divine Spouse," says the Ven. Mary of the Incarnation, "sud-

[1] The memory of the Passion, which often recurs to the mind of the contemplative, is much more an intellectual view than an imaginative representation. He who has reached the mystic state is deeply penetrated by the moral and physical sufferings of our Saviour, but he understands rather than depicts them.

denly one day I saw myself as if plunged into an abyss. All consolation left me. It seemed as if hitherto I had been the plaything of a dream. Nowhere could I find the least consolation, and even the counsels of my director caused me a real martyrdom. . . . What increased my misery was the thought of God, of whom I never lost sight, for it seemed to me that I no longer loved him.[1] I saw myself wholly filled with a mass of miseries and imperfections . . . my heart experienced a most strange anguish at the sight of the change which had taken place in me. Yet all the while my will was obedient. I was like a little infant wrapped in swaddling bands, who lies quiet and never speaks. *From afar off I saw that peace had retired into the very centre of my soul,* which acquiesced in all the dispositions of God in my regard, but *it was with difficulty that I was able to* recognise this acquiescence of my will."[2]

Marcelline Pauper († 1708) describes a similar state:

"About fifteen days after receiving this favour [she had been communicated miraculously] God permitted me to be tried by temptation in such a manner that all my passions seemed to have risen up to destroy me. At one and the same time I was tempted by doubts concerning the faith, blasphemy, impurity and gluttony. This lasted more than a month. This storm threw my soul into a state of terror, and my imagination was deeply moved. Nevertheless, there remained an interior depth, completely hidden, in which God still reigned, and where peace was undisturbed. Yet this peace was so deep down that the surface of my soul could receive from it neither consolation nor assurance. God granted me great graces to prevent my consenting to these temptations" (*Life* by herself, ch. vii, p. 37).

167. When there are none of these anxieties, nor even distractions, the soul enjoys a great happiness. If it is the action of God, strong and preventing, which captivates the whole soul, there is nothing to do but allow

[1] On the contrary, it was an infused love, very intense, but imperceptible, which continually brought her mind back to God, and which produced so lively a desire to love him better.

[2] *Life*, Pt. I, ch. vi.

ourselves to be borne onward by grace. At the same time that he is operating in the higher part, God often acts powerfully in the intellect, presenting to it in a brilliant light certain distinct ideas, in complete harmony with the general and confused view which resides in the summit of the spirit.

These lights vary greatly. Sometimes God urges the soul onward, making her understand that she is still far from loving him as he merits to be loved, and he excites in her will desires of more ardent love, of more intimate union, which charm and torture at the same time. When these divine illuminations bear especially upon the sanctity of God, and the unworthiness of his poor creature, the sentiment of sadness dominates, and this is what produces mystical sufferings. Yet so deep a confidence is joined to these anxieties of love that their bitterness is lessened, and may even be changed to a feeling of happiness.

At other times, it is concerning the infinite goodness, the love of her God, that the soul receives great lights. A very vivid impression suddenly seizes her, which makes her understand that God loves her. She feels this conviction born in her as perfectly as if God himself had said to her, "I love you." Sometimes, again, she feels herself manifestly united with God in a most sweet and delightful union, to the joy of which she abandons herself completely. *Dilectus meus mihi et ego illi;* my Beloved to me and I to him.

At other moments the soul is struck by certain distinct thoughts concerning the benefits of God, so ill-repaid, his omnipotence, his infinite greatness, the divine mysteries; the Blessed Trinity, the mutual love of the three divine Persons and their unalterable beatitude; concerning the Incarnation, the Redemption, the sufferings and the love of God made man. The divine light renders these great truths clear and brilliant to the contemplative; he grasps them more firmly than another could do by having recourse to reflections and considerations, and thence arise feelings of complacency very intense and very sweet. His gaze may be fixed for a prolonged period on the same truth with little change,

or he remains suspended in admiration, by means of which his love is redoubled.

168. In speaking here of distinct thoughts, it must be remarked that the contemplative soul enters little into detail, a comprehensive view is more agreeable to her. If, for example, she recalls the memory of the Incarnation, in one single glance she includes all that is prodigiously humble, prodigiously good in the Eternal Word made man for us. She sees simultaneously his infinite greatness and his ineffable abasement, his love for his Father and his devotion to mankind. This is why the masters say that contemplation grasps in one single gaze a great number of truths while meditation dissects and analyses them.

169. Often, then, in the measure in which fervent prayer is prolonged, the operations of the middle part slacken and life seems to retire into the supreme part of the soul. In reality, ideas become less distinct, the gaze more general, the intellect less active, or even as if suspended, leaving full play to the will which, on the contrary, sees its powers redouble their strength. The soul is plunged in love, which it is unable to analyse; it embraces God, unites itself to him, or rather flows sweetly into him; or again it remains silent, immersed in love. It desires only to love; it can do nothing but love. This is the purely mystical state, contemplative union without any admixture.

5. *More active co-operation with mystical graces.*

170. Hitherto we have supposed a case in which the divine action is strongly exerted, but often the preventing grace is scarcely perceptible, the mystical state existing but in slight measure. God then demands more from man's co-operation, and the faithful Christian ought to dispose himself more actively for the divine operations. He will do this precisely by having recourse to these remembrances, these simple and elevated thoughts, by producing these acts of love, complacency, and good-will, of which we have just been speaking, and which are in complete harmony with mystical opera-

tions.[1] The serious study of the attributes of God, and of the great mysteries of the faith is, for this reason, very profitable to the contemplative, who then recalls them more easily; the remembrance he has of them does not form the subject, properly speaking, of his prayer, but they are added to the general idea of God on which it is based, and, by means of the lights which God accords, they act in the same sense, and are favourable to loving union. Amongst these high truths there are usually some which strike the contemplative more than others, and towards which he is more attracted. It is to these that he should have recourse by preference; he is thus more certain to correspond with the designs of God, and he disposes himself better to receive divine lights. But he will recall them to his mind rather by a simple regard of faith than by reflex considerations, for which he no longer has any inclination. Besides, when we have often turned over in our minds the same truths, we include them all in one single glance, and they produce their effect more rapidly and more completely than if we examine them in detail.

171. To contemplative souls who suffer from distractions and from the insensibility of their hearts, St Jane de Chantal, so wise and so experienced, gives this counsel: "They ought to join themselves to God in the supreme point of their spirit and lose themselves entirely in him" (*Rép. sur le Coutoumier*). The Saint explains elsewhere (*Entret.*, 37) that to lose oneself in God is to be divested of our own will in order to will only what he wills and all that he wills. St Francis de Sales also recommends us to keep ourselves in the presence of God by a very simple acquiescence in the divine good pleasure. The contemplative, even when he has no feeling of love, knows that in the supreme part of his soul, what St Francis de Sales calls the point or apex of the will, he is closely united to the divine will. It is then possible for him to raise himself up to this supreme part, and there, despising the commotion which may be going on at the

[1] These acts, according to the most correct and happy expression of Père Poulain, may be called "additional acts" (*Les grâces d'oraison*, ch. ix).

same time in the inferior parts, to renew his union, then to keep himself gently and almost in silence united to all that God wills.[1] In thus acting, we assist the action of grace, we dispose ourselves for it, and we do not expose ourselves to the danger of hindering the exercise of the gifts, and, according to St. Paul, of quenching the divine spirit, as those do who are agitated and eager, multiplying acts in a restless and unquiet manner, or who seek sensible devotion with too great avidity.

"There are some souls," said St Jane de Chantal, "who go to their prayer with such eagerness and avidity that it is entertaining to see them. They are so ardent in discourse that they scarcely give themselves time to breathe. They say with so much affection: Alas! my Lord! that they appear to desire to melt away and annihilate themselves before him. This is not the way to act, but prayer should be made with great tranquillity and sweetness." The Saint desires that we should converse with God by means of words full of confidence, heart to heart, but secretly, "as if we would not wish even our Angel Guardian to know of it" (*Entretien*, 32 and 33; cp. St Teresa, *Way of Perfection*, ch. xxxi to the end).

172. When this mystical attraction is more strongly felt, it is time to follow the counsel of Denis, to forget all things, to forget oneself, to admire God, the incomprehensible Being, to unite oneself to him and to lose oneself in love. This transport of love is often of short duration, but it may be reiterated, and in the intervals we should follow the movements of grace and produce calmly and sweetly the acts which it inspires.

[1] St Jane de Chantal was all the better qualified to give this advice since she herself had received it supernaturally. We read, indeed, in the *Memoirs of Mme. de Chaugy* (p. 467) that one day, feeling deeply her own impotence, she heard these words: "It is no longer for you to work at your own interior, but let the divine Master work, for he has no need of your aid in his operations." Another time, June 8, 1636, praying in the oratory of her blessed Father, with great anguish on account of her temptations, she heard clearly his gentle voice saying, "Look at God, and let him act."

6. *How the superior powers are emancipated from the inferior faculties.*

173. Such, then, is the mystical state. It is evidently that in which the superior faculties, the intellect and the will, find their fullest scope. The trials which are experienced at the commencement of the contemplative way are just for the purpose of obtaining this most precious result—namely, to emancipate the superior powers, and to free them from the tyranny of the inferior faculties. This is brought to light by the teaching of the masters, it is proved by daily experience. "All these vagaries," says the Ven. Libermann,[1] speaking of the desire of sensible delights which is experienced in the lower sensitive nature, "torment and persecute the spiritual powers, and are great hindrances to their union with God. In the beginning, these persecutions rush upon them to drag them after them"; but later, "when these powers are strengthened and detached," the inferior attractions continue "to torment and trouble them, and thus disturb them again, because of the uncertainty they are in as to whether they have consented to these evil effects, and the fear they have of displeasing God. When the spiritual powers become yet more strengthened, they begin to ignore these troubles, and *little by little a kind of separation is established between the higher and lower powers;* the superior faculties are united with God by contemplation, and the senses no longer have any power over them."

174. It is for this reason also that persons who have not entered upon the mystic way are much more dependent on their indispositions, their humours. If they experience pains and repugnances, they are dominated by them; sorrow, bitterness, sufferings distract them and diminish their power for good; at the least, they have great difficulty in reacting against them, in maintaining themselves in recollection, the presence of God, and in the fervour of their prayer. If sometimes they ardently

[1] *Écrits spirit.* (complement to the instructions on prayer), principle 3, § 3, No. 1.

pray to be delivered from these evils, their fervour is short-lived. Souls who have attained the mystic state, on the contrary, are never more constantly united with God than in suffering.

The former are also much more dependent on exterior helps to devotion, such as touching ceremonies, the beauties of worship, or the charms of music. Mystical souls love the liturgical cult after a manner more angelic and less human, from their love of order, and for the honour of God, but they often acknowledge themselves to be just as closely united with God in complete solitude and in the silence of prayer.

175. Another very precious advantage of the mystical state is the frequency of acts which it produces. As these take place in the highest portion of the soul, they are not impeded, or at least not altogether hindered, by those of a lower kind, which are the work of the inferior and middle faculties. A person who has made some advance in the mystical state, even though he find himself in aridity, easily preserves his sense of the presence of God. "By very pure souls," says Père Lallemant, "contemplation may easily be exercised for several days in succession, even amid the distractions of worldly business."[1] So also they come to no decision, they are unwilling to give counsel without mentally having recourse to God. Hence they receive much light. If they are tempted by the devil, the remembrance of God who is so great and so kind, the thought of whom is scarcely ever absent from their mind, brings them an immediate assistance and renders the victory more prompt. Thus temptations are to them opportunities of making very perfect acts of the love of God. In this way their life becomes one of deep union with God, a life of perfection and of love.

7. *Incompatibility of the mystical state with hysteria.*

176. We have already said that the mystical state must not be confused with morbid conditions in which the soul loses the use of the exterior senses, but is at the

[1] Seventh Principle, ch. iv, art. 3, § 3.

same time deprived of the use of the superior faculties. The same learned unbelievers who confound rapture with lethargy or hypnosis are ready to describe the mystical state as one of nervous over-excitement, or one in which imagination and sensibility have too great predominance. They know practically nothing of mystical operations, and as they wish to descant on subjects of which they are ignorant, they cannot fail to be guilty of gross errors. But we are not writing for them; it is, besides, useless to argue with people who do not even admit the possibility of the very real conditions we are dealing with.

But our believing readers must have seen, from the explanations we have given, the opposition which, on the contrary, exists between the mystical state and nervous diseases. So, also, persons who have attained a high degree of the mystical state, or have entered in and made some progress, are endowed with well-balanced minds. Indeed, when the nervous system is unduly developed, sensibility is exaggerated, the judgement atrophied, the will fettered and sometimes enslaved; the progress of such souls is so slow that they seldom reach the mystical state. Those who allow themselves to be governed by their sensibility do not get beyond the inferior stages of piety, they never arrive at perfect virtue.[1]

177. We cannot too strongly impress on pious souls how unreasonable and ill-ordered are the impressions of nervous excitement and the false imaginations which are their consequence, nor can we urge them too earnestly to despise them, not to let their conduct be influenced by them, to make reason their guide. In the affairs of the soul they should never rest on feeling, but lean only on faith. Again, in times of dryness, they must be warned against the lethargy to which persons of an extroverted disposition too often yield, even though formerly they

[1] Persons of a nervous temperament are capable of receiving mystical graces if they have sufficient self-control to practise renunciation generously, but their too great sensibility often hinders mystical operations, and it is difficult to discern them from what is only the effect of the imagination and the sensitive appetite.

may have received mystical graces of an undoubted character; for then, instead of reacting strongly against this aridity, they give way, and pass the time of prayer in inaction, and on the pretext that they are unable to pray, they fall into a real spiritual laziness, which is the source of many evils. True mystical prayer, let us again repeat, in company with the Saints, true mystical prayer augments all the virtues; humility, patience, the love of crosses, are its most reliable indications. It could not well be otherwise, for the chief characteristic of the mystical state is that God is the chief worker in it, and the action of God can only produce light and perfection.

CHAPTER XV

DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE ASCETICAL AND MYSTICAL STATES

1. *Reasons for this study.—Resemblances between the two states.*

178. WHERE does the "extraordinary"[1] begin in the spiritual life? Many modern authors call "ordinary" all that belongs to the ascetic state, "extraordinary" all that is mystical; others call mystical contemplation by the name of "ordinary" contemplation. Which are we to believe?

Evidently, as we have already explained, this divergence of opinion comes from the different notions of contemplation in vogue. We do not need to repeat what we have already said; but in order to render our doctrine more precise, to give a clearer and more distinct idea of the mystical state, it will not be amiss to compare it with other spiritual states, especially the ascetical, to which it succeeds. We shall thus establish the resemblances by which they are united and the differences which separate them; this will show us whether the mystical state really deserves the title "extraordinary."

179. "The word 'asceticism,' ἄσκησις, had been used by the Fathers of the first centuries of our era to denote the efforts or struggle of the Christian soul against everything within her or around her which was opposed to the practice of virtue or Christian perfection" (*Dict.*

[1] The word "extraordinary," we confess, lacks precision. Many apply it to every eminent grace, because all that is eminent is relatively rare. But to attain to perfection, eminent graces are necessary: they are given to every faithful soul in the *regular order,* thus they ought not to be called *extraordinary.* By this term *extra ordinem* ought to be understood all that is outside the normal way, *even in its highest degrees,* and supposes an exceptional vocation; it is in this sense that we understand it.

de théolog., "Ascétisme"). As this conflict continues throughout life and is obligatory on souls even in the highest paths, the word "asceticism" was for a long time applied to the whole spiritual life. Later on, it became customary to reserve the epithet "ascetic" to states in which conflict, struggle, ἄσκησις were predominant, in which the efforts of the soul must be continued, the loving repose, the divine union so ardently desired not yet being attained. The purifications through which the soul passes prepare her in a mysterious manner for this divine union, this encounter between the soul and God, in which the divine operation is more mysterious still. Hence the term "mystical" has come to be applied to those higher states in which grace works in a manner at once new and more deeply hidden.

In the mystical state, as in the ascetic, there are lights and love; supernatural lights, due to the action of grace and having for their principal object the divine perfections known by revelation; supernatural love having the same principal object—namely, God, and the same motive, his worthiness of all our love. Suarez here makes a very judicious remark when he says that in contemplation there is not, on the part of the will, any different act from those exercised in a lower degree of prayer (see *Vie d'Union*, No. 360).

Since, then, in both these states, the soul exercises the same virtues of faith, hope and charity, we conclude that one may be the continuation and crown of the other, as the masters teach, and that we may pass from one to the other without violence, and even very often without being aware of it. More than once we have had occasion to say that numerous modern authors, setting aside the traditional doctrine, have exaggerated the differences between the two states; but, if we must not exaggerate them, neither must we misunderstand them.

180. One difference, concerning which all authors agree, is the difference of intensity; as a general rule, the light and love of the ascetical state are less than those of the mystical state; in the latter they may attain to an extremely high degree.

2. Ascetical lights and mystical lights.

181. But this difference is not of itself sufficient to explain what the doctors teach us concerning the mystical state. They do not represent it simply as a higher degree of the state of grace, but as a new mode of the operation of the Holy Spirit in souls. In the ascetic state the lights are *acquired;* the soul is enlightened in the course of her ordinary procedure, that is, by listening to instruction, by reflecting, by drawing conclusions from the principles placed before her. Her love is also an *acquired* love;[1] she maintains, exercises and augments it by her own activity, by passing over in her memory and attentively considering the motives which should draw her to the love of God.

In the mystical state the Holy Spirit substitutes his own operation for the workings of human activity. Light and love are not merely produced in the soul by her own labour; they are poured into her by the Holy Ghost himself. The soul is moved rather than moves herself—*mens humana non se habet ut movens sed magis ut mota* (*St Thomas*, II-II, Q. 52, a. 2, ad ix).

182. Such is the true principle of distinction between the mystical and ascetical states: mystics and theologians ought to concur in recognising this. "Evidently there can be no question here," writes Père Boulesteix (*Revue Augustinienne*, July 15, 1907), "of such a distinction between our acts that it would issue in a distinction of faculties. Even our mystical acts are in fact elicited by our natural faculties. Moreover, we cannot make this distinction of acts on the part of the object. *It is, as we know, impossible to admit two kinds of supernatural order, specifically distinct, one mystic, the other non-mystic.* Therefore we can

[1] Is it necessary to say that we take this word in a relative sense? Speaking absolutely, even in the ascetic state, light and love are not purely acquired, since they are supernatural, and all that is supernatural is infused. But it is the habits which are infused, the virtues of faith, hope, and love; and the soul which possesses these can produce their acts. In the mystical state, the acts themselves are infused by God into the soul: here there is faith and love in full working.

only deduce this distinction from the mode of production of the acts. Such is, indeed, the doctrine we uphold, in affirming that the distinctive character of mystical acts is that they are brought about in a very special manner by the intervention of God: the acts are elicited by us, but under the influence of the gifts of the Holy Spirit."[1]

183. Is there no other difference between the ascetic and mystical states? If there is only diversity of agent, the acts being the same, would not the difference between the two states be extrinsic and wholly superficial? The difference is profound, and it is not without reason that God substitutes his own action for human initiative.

In both states, as we have said, the soul receives supernatural lights concerning the divine perfections, but in the mystical state there are lights quite different from those of the ascetic state; *here, the acts of the gifts of understanding and wisdom are added* to those

[1] Père Poulain—followed by others—has always reproached me with not admitting a specific difference between the ascetical and mystical states. In my opinion, he affirms, it is only the same state intensified, and to be a mystic it would suffice to be more enlightened and more fervent (*Revue du clergé français,* June 15 and August 15, 1908). This author has never taken into account the doctrine of theologians, taught no less clearly by St Teresa, concerning the two modes of operation of divine grace. Yet it is no small difference that God should intervene directly and substitute his own operation for human activity, for this is what makes contemplative prayer mysterious and has earned for it the title of mystic. Supposing that a traveller, wishing to scale a mountain, whose altitude might be a hundred thousand kilomètres—and we must multiply this by a hundred if we wish to symbolise not merely perfection, but heroism and sanctity—trusted only to his own limbs, he could never reach the summit. But if a flying machine, aeroplane or dirigible balloon, were placed at his disposal, carried by its motive power, whose mechanism he would only have to supervise, in a shorter or longer period he would be able to reach the summit. Further, if his body were spiritualised like a glorified body, and released from the laws of gravity, he could raise himself without effort, as did our Lord when he ascended into heaven. These three methods of ascension represent well enough the three modes of operation of grace—ascetic, mystic, and angelic. Would it be reasonable to say that there is no difference worth mentioning between climbing up on foot and rising in an aeroplane, and that there is no need to distinguish between them?

of simple faith. Faith having presented to the soul the truths to which she adheres, the gift of understanding causes her to penetrate their meaning (cf. Suarez, *De Gratia*, Book II, ch. xix, No. 6). Doubtless the Holy Spirit strengthens the act of faith, rendering the adherence of the faithful soul firmer and more ardent. He gives a conviction of the truths of the faith stronger and almost irresistible, and it is impossible for the soul to doubt that there is a God, heaven and hell. This enables her to stand firm amid the most terrible trials. But there is something more. By faith, the soul had said: I believe because God has spoken; by the gift, she understands better what God has said, she obtains a *new understanding* of the divine perfections which simple faith would not have given, which she was powerless to acquire by her own reflections.

The gift of wisdom adds also a new perfection to what the soul already possessed by faith; by faith, she said, I accept these truths; by wisdom, she says, These truths are beautiful, worthy of God; I love them, and I find them so much the more easy of belief because the Holy Spirit has made me "taste" them, pouring out on me, when I recall them, an intimate relish (*goût*), profound, indefinable (cf. Suarez, *ibid.*, xviii, 17, 18, and 19).

184. This doctrine of the theologians is every day confirmed by experience. A certain soul may long have known that God is a God of goodness and love; she accepted this truth with her whole heart, like all those taught by faith. But see how suddenly during prayer this same truth seizes and penetrates her; she is recollected in spirit by a power which will not be denied. At the same time there is born in this soul an ineffable sense of peace, profound happiness and a love at once calm and ardent. He who has never experienced these interior phenomena will scarcely understand them. But let him not refuse to believe in them, or he will find the writings of mystics, full of allusions to such effects of grace, sealed to him.

185. When truth has thus entered into a faithful

soul, especially when the operation of mystical grace has been powerful, it will remain there deeply engraven. "The lights which come from God by a strong impression," says the Ven. Mary of the Incarnation, "are not like those which are drawn from books, or which come from the instructions of men. These are easily forgotten, but the others make such an impression on the soul that they are never forgotten, but are firmly established" (*Vie*, by Cl. Martin, ch. xx, p. 84). If anyone during weeks or whole months continually returns, in prayer, to one text of Scripture, which suffices to unite him to God—such for example as this: God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son; or this other: Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end—one may conclude with certainty that mystical lights concerning the love of God have been received.

186. By these lights the soul does not pass out of the order of faith; they enlighten faith, they render it more living and more perfect, but they are not substituted for it, because those who receive them continue to have recourse to motives of faith on which to rest their belief.

3. *Ascetical love and mystical love.*

187. Love, as we have said, has the same object in either state. Even in heaven charity will be substantially the same as on earth: *manet autem charitas* (1 Cor. xiii); but there it will have different modalities, being then necessary, uninterrupted, always the same, and impossible to be lost. Here below it will always remain free, meritorious, subject to variation and even to ruin. These characteristics of the charity which belongs to souls in this land of trial cannot but be found in mystical love. Besides, the latter only differs from ascetic love by its genesis, its purity and its perfection. If it were granted to us to see, as do the angels and elect, the difference between the acts of love produced by the efforts of the soul and those which *God himself implants in the will*, we should see

in these latter, even when they are calm, almost imperceptible and apparently less intense, a purity, delicacy, and perfection which are not found in the former, so superior are the effects produced by the divine operation to those of human activity.

For this reason the Saints and doctors strongly recommend the contemplative, when he is under the action of the Holy Spirit, not to change the character of his contemplation by mingling the laboricus working of his reason, and the not less laborious efforts of his will, with the divine illuminations and impulses. Although by so doing he might be able to produce acts more deeply felt, more vehement affections, yet he would gain less than by gently yielding himself to the divine operation.

188. They also teach that the working of grace in contemplative souls tends to free them more and more from all eagerness, all too-human activity, in order to reduce them to passivity.[1] When it is perfect, passivity becomes the union of transformation, in which the soul co-operates with grace by accepting the impulses of the Holy Spirit, by adhering joyously, fully, lovingly to the divine action, which has become, in souls of such admirable fidelity, much more constant, and is almost continuously exercised; such is the state expressed by the celebrated words of St Paul: *Vivo, jam non ego, vivit vero in me Christus.*

In his *Introduction à la vie et aux vertus chrétiennes* (ch. viii) M. Olier has described the passive state very well. "What we call being spiritual and living in the spirit in all things comes about when the Holy Spirit

[1] We make use of this word "passivity" because it is the received term, and because we know no other. But it is well to remark that in mysticism it has an entirely different meaning from that in current use, in which it denotes a kind of inertia. The soul in this state, while receiving motions of grace stronger and more continuous than before, yet always very delicate, is in reality more active, more free than ever. Speaking of the gifts of the Holy Spirit—and passivity is nothing else than the full expansion, the perfect development of the gifts—St Thomas says: "Man undergoes the action of the Holy Spirit, but in such a manner that he acts himself, because he is free": *Homo sic agitur a Spiritu Sancto quod etiam agit, in quantum est liberi arbitrii,* I-II, Q. 68, a. 3, ad 2.

is the principle of all our activities, when he possesses our whole being, when he holds us in his arms and carries us wherever he pleases. And although this is done more sensibly in some cases than in others, *nevertheless it does really take place in all those who desire to mortify themselves, and who renounce themselves and their own nature in everything.*"

"When we give place to the Holy Spirit, allowing him full liberty to act and to do with us as he pleases, he never fails to act in us and to guide us. He never fails to take possession of our powers, in order to raise them to the work God desires of us, because he is in us and dwells in us only to operate through us for the glory of God. He is in us for no other purpose than to quicken us and to be the principle of our new life and of the divine life by which we ought to live."

189. Let us illustrate this state of passivity by a few examples.

In the writings of St. Gertrude (I, 16) we read that one of her sisters knew by revelation that all the gifts which Gertrude had hitherto received were little in comparison with what was about to be bestowed upon her, and that she would attain to so perfect a union with God that *she would see only what God wished to see by her eyes, she would only say what God desired to say by her mouth, and so on of all the other senses.*

"I felt our Lord within me," relates Père Surin, "as a sovereign who governs everything with a power absolute, yet full of sweetness and charm; . . . I often felt that it was his good pleasure to reign over all the movements of my soul and body."[1] "In saying these words: My God, you are my all," says Soeur Marie de Ste Thérèse,[2] "I knew in a delightful manner all that God is to holy souls and also to me. This made me repose lovingly in him, because the Holy Spirit was acting for me, and I knew quite well that he was my action, my strength, my light, my power, my will, my

[1] *Hist. des possessions de Loudun,* Pt. IV, ii, 10.

[2] The life of this humble sister, Carmelite at Bordeaux (1640-1717), presents a mystical doctrine at once very true and very profound.

prayer, my praise, and my thanksgiving for his grace."

St Margaret Mary describes the same state of passivity: "This Sovereign Spirit, who operated and acted in me independently of myself, had gained so absolute an empire over my spiritual and even corporal being, that it was no longer in my power to excite in my heart any movement of joy or sorrow except as he pleased. Neither could I fix my mind on any occupation other than that which he was pleased to give it" (*Autobiographie*, p. 77).

190. This passivity is the summit of the mystic state; it helps us to understand the lower degrees in which the action of the Holy Spirit is less sensible, but still certainly exists; for in every mystical state there is an infusion of light and love.

In the ascetic state, then, we must make efforts; we must reflect in order to obtain light, we must do violence to ourselves to obtain strength to act. Doubtless, God assists these efforts, but the desired grace, the grace which enlightens, the grace which fortifies, these are only obtained in consequence of our effort. If the soul sees an obstacle in her path, she reasons, she encourages herself, she resolves to do herself violence in order to overcome it; thus, laboriously, she obtains grace. In the mystical state, especially when it has attained its full development, the divine action is more preventing; it anticipates our deliberations. Without any reflection on the soul's part, God pours into her a grace which enlightens and enkindles; he solicits her, often he urges her to overcome obstacles, or rather he does this himself, the soul being only his free and happy instrument, for she finds peace and happiness in the violence she imposes on herself, in the sufferings she endures.

4. *Mystical feelings: peace, sweetness, desire, pain.*

191. We should gain but an incomplete idea of mystical love, we could not rightly understand how it resembles or differs from ascetic love, did we not

analyse the effects by which it is accompanied. These often reveal its presence to the loving soul herself, for it is easier to recognise the effects of love than love itself.

Very different are the effects produced by the same love. Sometimes it causes most sweet joy, sometimes bitter pain, yet again its effect is confined to inspiring energetic resolutions, but it can scarcely exist without being accompanied by feelings either sweet or painful or else generous resolutions. When the Holy Spirit pours mystical love into the soul, it produces either delights which may be very varied, pain more or less bitter, or else strong and solid resolutions.

The joys of love vary considerably. The joy of loving is itself very sweet, the more so in proportion as the love is purer and more perfect. The eye delights in seeing, the ear in listening, the understanding in exercising its penetration in seeking, finding and contemplating truth. And what suffering may there not be when the eye can no longer see, the ear no longer perceive sounds, when the intellect is conscious of being obscured, impotent; the pain then experienced makes us realise how much sweetness was to be found in the use of the faculties. Besides, and still more, the heart delights in loving, and as loving is the most elevated of all human acts, the simple exercise of love can procure real enjoyment.

But love engenders desires, which, if they are satisfied, bring to the heart other joys, and these again, while different from the joy of loving, differ again among themselves in relish and sweetness. Thus, for a father to see his son carry off a brilliant success, to recover him safely after a long absence, to see him escape a grave danger, or again to know him to be virtuous, esteemed by all, these are joys very different in character.

In order that our love may produce these joys, it is not necessary for our loved one to be present, or that we should enjoy his company or conversation. The mother whose child is yet unborn enjoys by anticipation the joys of maternity; she loves to think of her

absent spouse; she finds intense pleasure in the mere remembrance of those she loves.

192. Mystical love, being in itself very sublime and pure, is of such a nature as to cause a sweet satisfaction in the soul; as its seat is in the superior portion of the will,[1] this satisfaction is not in itself sensible; it is an intimate and profound peace which only those who have tasted are able to comprehend. If it should overflow into sensitive nature, the enjoyment becomes sensible, and as the whole of the soul then participates, she tastes profound delight.

In various passages St Teresa points out that the joys of contemplation are the joys of infused love: "This very sweet love of God enters into our soul, and there causes a certain deep satisfaction, although we know not whence so great a happiness proceeds" (*Thoughts on the Canticle*, iv, p. 248). "From this great satisfaction experienced by the soul in the prayer of quietude I conclude that the greater part of the time the soul is united (by love) to him who is alone capable of satisfying her" (*Way of Perf.*, xxxi, p. 145).

Mystical peace, being the fruit of love, is not destroyed by the sufferings which sometimes accompany this love; in this case it is not easy to discern, but it does subsist in spite of the violence of pain, which sometimes is so great as to cause the soul a veritable martyrdom.

To this mystic peace may be joined other joys of a delightful character, such as that of seeing oneself close to God, of enjoying the sweetness of his presence. Does not he who loves enjoy real happiness in merely being near the object of his love? Such is again the joy of knowing him to be within us, of possessing him in Holy Communion; the joy of being loved by so loving a God, of being loaded by him with benefits, the joy of knowing him to be so good, so beautiful, so great, so happy; the joy of seeing him

[1] Our Lord told St Teresa that the word *spiritus* in the second verse of the *Magnificat—Et exultavit spiritus meus*—denotes the superior part of the will (*Relacion*, Vol. II, p. 59). Gerson had explained this verse in a similar manner (*Alphabet*, 17, circa finem).

loved by the just on earth, by the elect in heaven; the joy of having laboured for him, the joy of suffering for him. And the joys, which in a lower state could be acquired by consideration of these same truths, cause a pleasure altogether different in the mystical state, when it is God who makes us grasp them, when he himself communicates to us the joys to which they are related.

This intervention of God is specially noticeable in the kind of joy last mentioned, a joy which is occasioned by what, in other circumstances, would cause only pain; I mean humiliations and sufferings. Being rightly considered, such things as tribulation and contempt may come to be accepted by us with resignation, but not with a strong and enduring love. Such consideration will not make us desire them, or accept them with that peaceful, profound, and sometimes even overflowing joy which God communicates to his suffering friends.

Mystical joys may give rise to transports; more often they calm the soul; but besides joys, love may also engender desires which, like joys, may cause impetuous outbursts of feeling. Mystical desires are also infused, as St Teresa very well explains in a passage of her letter to St Peter of Alcantara. "These desires which I have of loving, serving, seeing God are no longer produced by considerations. Formerly, at a time when I considered myself very fervent, I easily shed abundance of tears, but now my soul becomes so inflamed with desire that if God did not bring me relief by a rapture, in which it obtains satisfaction, I feel that I should die of it."

193. Unsatisfied desires may cause acute sadness. Love has, indeed, its pain, its anguish, and its regret. Often the Holy Spirit infuses sorrowful love into the soul, which then participates in the suffering of Jesus. She realises, sometimes quite suddenly, some truth of a sad nature, which penetrates her with profound grief. Speaking of this kind of transport, St Teresa says: "It arises most frequently from a sudden realisation that the soul is absent from God. . . . This thought

is sometimes so strong and powerful that in an instant the soul seems to be beside herself" (Letter to Père Rodr. Alvarez). This feeling of the absence of God, accompanied by a vivid light concerning his attractions, is one of the most torturing sorrows of mystic love. The thought of the offences offered to God, the ingratitude of men, our own faults, the consciousness of our inability to taste, or even, it seems, to exercise our love, our incapacity of worthily serving God, of glorifying him as he deserves, all this may sometimes produce most bitter pain. Sometimes these thoughts are very clear, they are impressed strongly and irresistibly in our spirit; concerning the sufferings they cause, we can only say what we just now said of mystic joys: their bitterness is very varied. At other times these griefs are more vague; they are intermingled in a manner difficult to describe, and produce a profound but ill-defined dissatisfaction.

Elsewhere we have described (*Degrees*, Book VI, ch. ii, § 2) how in the mystic state sufferings and joys are strangely intermingled without destroying each other; we meet with sorrows which are at once most bitter and most delightful (see in particular St Teresa, *Sixth Mansion*, ch. ii).

194. To sum up: with these two elements, light and love, which include so many varieties, God produces in the soul very different phenomena: consoling lights, annihilating lights, crucifying lights; love enjoying, love suffering, calm love, ardent love, anxious love, insatiable love. Thus he consoles, he enkindles, he purifies, he strengthens; thus he leads the docile and faithful soul to the degree and kind of sanctity to which he has predestined it.

It is now easy to conclude that these mystical graces are not outside the way which normally leads to perfection; they are not accessory supplements, additional helps beyond what is necessary, but, on the contrary, the ordinary means which God uses to bring souls to perfection. They ought to be called eminent graces in opposition to the ordinary graces which proceed from reflection, but the name of extraordinary ought

to be reserved to other favours such as the angelic state, visions, revelations, ecstasies, stigmata, etc., without which we may be raised to a high degree of sanctity.

5. *The mystical trial of impotence, and the temptations of the mystical state.*

195. When mystical love is accompanied by this peace, or the feelings of bitterness or sweetness which we have just described, it is easily recognised; these delights or griefs themselves reveal its presence, for they can only be the effect of love, and it is not acquired love which has produced them, since they in no way resemble the feelings of the same kind which the soul can acquire by its considerations. Besides, the direct operation of the Holy Spirit is recognisable by the manner in which these mystical sentiments seize the soul, impose themselves upon her, and penetrate her inmost depths.

There are other states in which the presence of mystical love is less easily discerned. St John of the Cross recognises this in several passages (see above, No. 94; *Vie d'Union*, No. 336). St Teresa points out with much emphasis, a state in which infused love is met with, but is difficult to recognise (*Life*, ch. xxx). The Saint declares that she was frequently in this state about the forty-fourth year of her life. When she describes it, three years later, she was still experiencing it from time to time, but less often. "All the graces I had received from our Lord," she says, "were effaced from my memory; a vague memory like that of a dream alone remained, and this only saddened me. My mind was in darkness, so that I experienced a thousand doubts and fears. I thought that I had never understood what was passing within me; perhaps I was the prey of illusions, but was it not sufficient to have deceived myself without also deceiving others? I seemed to be so wicked that all the evils and heresies in the world appeared to be the consequence of my sins. . . . This sometimes lasted a week or a fort-

night, three weeks, or even longer. . . . The devil suddenly fills my mind with notions so foolish that at any other time I should only laugh at them; he plunges it into every kind of trouble; the soul seems to be fettered, she is no longer mistress of herself; she can think of nothing else than these follies which are thrust upon her. . . . I then feel as if the devils were playing ball with my soul, which cannot escape from them. It is impossible to say how one suffers in such a case: the soul seeks a refuge, but God does not permit her to find one; nothing remains but the light of free will, but this is so obscured that it seems as if her eyes were blindfolded. . . . Faith is then deadened and slumbering, like all the other virtues, but it still exists. . . . The soul is then cramped and torpid; she knows God as one knows something heard afar off; her love is so cold that if anyone speaks of God in her presence, she listens, and she believes because it is the faith of Holy Church, but she no longer remembers what she used to feel in the depths of her soul. . . . At other times my pain is caused by the impossibility of forming any thought or desire of any good work. . . . Again, I sometimes find myself in a sort of stupidity, such that I can do neither good nor evil; I go on, as we say, putting one foot before the other, experiencing neither suffering nor joy, insensible to life or death, pleasure or sorrow; nothing affects me."

196. It is easy to understand the providential design in this trial: it is to make it evident to the faithful soul that the generous love she used to feel was not her own work, that of herself she is but impotence and nothingness. But is the trial itself a mystical state proceeding from infused love? At first sight it seems not. Yet St Teresa declares that in this state "the soul is not without receiving great graces," and to designate these graces she employs the word by which she characterises mystical favours: *Grandes mercedes*. Doubtless the soul does not then experience those movements and effects by which ordinarily she recognises her love; *no lo sienten movimientos ni efectos para que se entienda el alma*, but the resignation and

holy indifference in which she perseveres, notwithstanding so many miseries, seem to the Saint a proof of its presence; and it is certainly not by any efforts of her own that she has attained to a love so constant and meritorious. St Teresa assures us that the soul comes forth from such sufferings like gold from the crucible, more refined and more brilliant, *mas afinada y glorificada*, which could not be the case did she remain inert and without love.

To us there seems no doubt that in this state of apparent impotence, the will, under the action of the Holy Spirit, persists in a free disposition of the love of God with firm resolutions and an absolute abandonment to the divine will. If it does not experience the joy of loving, yet it loves unknown to itself, and with a very meritorious love, were it only by this attachment to the will of God, which is communicated to it by God, and which it fully accepts, without consciousness that it does so. In all these states of mystic trial the gifts of the Holy Spirit continue to operate: thus in these darkened souls the gift of understanding maintains that high idea of God which has not been obtained by considerations; the gift of knowledge reveals to them their misery and the nothingness of all creatures; the gift of fortitude sustains them; it alone renders them firm and constant.

197. The mystical state may very well continue to exist even amidst the most crushing temptations, and when the soul believes she has become the prey of the most tyrannical vices. Is it not almost an axiom of the spiritual life that many virtues are only strengthened by the temptations which wage war upon her, and that heroism is only reached through valiantly sustained combats, in which the powers of the faithful soul are exercised and perfected? But she must at the same time receive eminent graces, which correspond with the severity and difficulty of the struggle. Such a soul, in her intervals of calm, tastes the delights of infused love; when attacked by temptation, instead of enjoying the sweetness of love, the soul suffers violent combats: has God now withdrawn the graces of love

he was wont to bestow on her? No, for often she experiences powerful attractions towards God in her higher faculties, whilst in the lower ones she is subject to violent inclinations towards evil, which cause her terrible distress. And even if the attractions of divine love are as if insensible, if the soul seems wrapped in darkness, God does not, for all that, cease to communicate to her the graces of infused love, which fortify her and facilitate the victory. St Teresa (*Fourth Mansion*, I, p. 50) recognises that the soul may be closely united with God in the higher mansions of the castle, where God himself resides, while her thoughts are outside among the venomous beasts, which cause her to suffer cruelly, while at the same time she merits greatly.

6. *The influence of mystical gifts on the conduct of our life.*

198. The mystical lights accorded by God to faithful souls are of great assistance to them in the whole conduct of their life. By the very fact that they have a higher and truer idea of God, these souls understand much better what is due to him; they see more clearly how, in every circumstance of life, they ought to prefer the interests of his glory before all else. They easily discern the slightest faults and imperfections which others let pass unperceived. The infused love communicated to them by God strengthens them in the practice of perfect virtues and helps to make their conscience more enlightened and more delicate.

Besides gaining for us these precious lights, which increase our merit and sanctify our life, by the reception of mystical gifts we are preserved from many errors. Philosophers have little difficulty in showing that the greater number of human errors proceed from the passions; as our will has so great an influence on our judgement, when the former is not upright, it falsifies the latter. Thus mystical gifts, while powerfully maintaining the soul in uprightness of will and freeing it from the influence of the passions and natural

attachments, communicate to it great rectitude of judgement.

199. It must, however, be noted that these high lights do not necessarily prevent all error; even in the holiest souls may be encountered certain errors and mistakes which do not diminish their merit. St Alphonsus Rodriguez, having received from his superior the order to eat a plate of soup, reduced the plate to powder in order to be able to eat it, not distinguishing between the container and the contained. Another time, he obstinately refused to open the doors to the viceroy and the bishop, who had come to be present at a play, because his superior, who had not expected these great personages to arrive so early, wishing to avoid the invasion of the crowd, had fixed a later hour for the opening of the doors. The Saint was favoured with very high lights concerning the greatness and value of obedience, but his judgement went astray in the manner of obeying.

The case of Père Surin is more extraordinary still. For several years, while preserving heroic dispositions in the centre of his soul, he believed himself damned without hope, and was so unreasonable that many grave persons thought him mad. Not only had his imagination gone astray, but his reason also was partially blinded. "During the whole of this time," he says, "I had an idea of the greatness and majesty of God, which was always present to my mind, and crushed me with its weight (ch. x). At the same time, in some other region of my soul there was an intimate love for Jesus Christ. . . . My soul never lost its attention to God, nor the desire to do what I believed to be his will . . . it desired to be conformed to Jesus Christ, to submit itself to him in reparation for the abandonment and the sufferings of his sacred humanity" (ch. viii) (*Hist. abregée de la possession*, etc., part 3, Book I). His reason, weakened, troubled by the devil and also, it seems, by illness, could not see that his persistent persuasion of his perdition was in contradiction with the very true ideas he still retained of the goodness and sanctity of God. He was at the

same time very foolish and very wise, much despised by men and very meritorious before God.

More astonishing still was the case of Blessed Louis Aleman, who played so great a part at the Council of Basle. He had been deeply affected by the evils caused, at the time of the great schism, by those pontiffs who had not been able, at least by resigning, to put an end to so terrible a disorder. Like others of his contemporaries, men of great virtue, in quite good faith he arrived at the conclusion that councils were superior to popes, and that this ought to be proclaimed, in order to prevent fresh misfortunes. This error drew him into actions in themselves very reprehensible. Perhaps the conduct of Savonarola might be explained by a similar error.

However, such aberrations are very rare in those who have attained a high degree of mystical grace; on the contrary, it is remarkable how quickly they unmask error, when it is pernicious, for the Holy Spirit who enlightens and guides them discovers it to them.

7. *The passions in the mystical state.*

200. When we find spiritual writers recommending their readers to wage a pitiless war on nature, to stifle what is human that it may give place to the divine, to place oneself in a holy indifference, in order to draw down upon oneself mystical gifts, are we not tempted to believe that a truly spiritual man ought no longer to feel any movement of his passions, and to keep himself in a complete apathy, in an absolute impassibility, waiting for every impulse to come from God alone?

This would be an error. Grace does not destroy nature; it directs and perfects it, while leaving it all that is not incompatible with itself. Those who desire to feel no movement, no stirring in the lower part of their nature, would rather deprive themselves, as says St Augustine, of what is essential to nature than acquire true tranquillity: *Humanitatem potius amittunt quam veram assequuntur tranquillitatem* (*De Civit. Dei*, xiv, 9).

We must not therefore think that the passions disappear in the mystical state. What, then, are the passions?

The passions[1] are movements in the inferior part of the soul which, being stirred—by a sensible emotion, by the attraction which they feel towards some good or by the aversion they experience from some evil—pursue the former with avidity or eagerly turn away from the latter.

The concupiscences of the soul may be aroused by real goods, equally with false goods and the illicit enjoyments desired by nature. So, also, repugnances may have for object true evils, but also those things which appear to be evil, but to the eyes of faith are advantages, such as suffering. Thus the passions may be justly moved as they may, on the contrary, pursue false goods or violently oppose themselves to evils which are not truly evil. In the latter case they are in revolt against reason and faith.

This rebellion of the passions is generally less strong in mystical souls, because they are seated in inferior nature, which, in such persons being dominated and governed by the superior faculties, has lost much of its violence. At times, it is true, in order to try them and give them an opportunity of practising virtue, God permits the devil to rouse their dormant passions and produce vehement attractions towards evil. But, more generally, mystical souls are much more calm, and less easily moved than others by natural circumstances, either pleasing or displeasing. Even when they experience violent temptations, they remain, in their higher nature, very enlightened and completely masters of themselves. They may suffer, but they remain united with God in their will, and, by means of this loving union, which makes them cling more closely to him when they feel themselves being drawn away from him, they dominate their disturbed passions and keep their peace of soul.

On the contrary, in non-mystical souls, disturbances

[1] There are eleven passions—love, hatred, desire, flight or repugnance, joy or delight, sadness, hope, despair, courage, fear, anger.

in inferior nature happen more frequently; they cause real trouble, obscure the reason, and diminish the energy of the will.

Should the self-love of such a soul be wounded, all her passions will be aroused. She will feel an antipathy for those who humiliate her, she cannot see them without being moved, she is irritated at hearing them praised, she manifests her displeasure by her stiffness, her ill-humour, and she seeks means of "paying them out." If she does not go as far as this, at least she is disturbed by the injury to her own reputation, she anxiously seeks means to re-establish it; she says again and again how unjust is the criticism to which she has been subjected; she thinks of it incessantly, and will not be consoled. These preoccupations and annoyances diminish her fervour and stifle her holy desires.

Should the same humiliation come upon a mystical soul, the rebellion of the passions will be much weaker; it will provoke protestations of the love of God, acts of humility, of joyous acceptance, which will subjugate the troubles caused by the passions and quickly restore peace.

201. If the passions of the soul are less easily moved towards evil in mystic souls because they are outweighed by the holy affections which reign in their will, where good things are concerned they may be as easily aroused as in others. Then, all the powers of the soul converge towards the same end, acts of virtue are elicited more easily and with more fervour. "Experience shows," says St Thomas (*De veritate*, Q. xxvi, a. 7), "that we act more powerfully, with more facility and promptitude, when the inferior appetite is united with the will, because the inferior appetite, being attached to the bodily organs, is easily roused to action, and contributes directly to produce it. This it was which led St Augustine to say (*De Civit. Dei*, ix, 5) that the tender movements of compassion and mercy we often feel are of service to reason, enabling it to exercise mercy in such a way as to harmonise with justice."

Was not our Lord deeply moved at seeing the grief

of the widow of Naim, the faith of the centurion, the humility of the Canaanean woman, the sad state of certain sick people, paralytics, lepers, the possessed? At Bethany, did he not mingle his tears with those of Martha and Mary; did he not weep over Jerusalem; did he not on many occasions give vent to his indignation at seeing the hypocrisy of the Pharisees, and even to a holy anger at the profanation of his Father's House?

Mystics resemble our Lord still more than do other Christians; in them the well-disciplined passions of the soul are principles of strength, not of weakness. Therefore do we find among them artists, poets, orators; their words often have the accents of a touching eloquence, and for the most part they excel in the gift of communicating to their hearers the holy emotions they themselves experience.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX I[1]

THE WIDELY DIFFERENT AND ILL-FOUNDED MOTIVES WHICH ARE BROUGHT FORWARD TO DISTINGUISH ACQUIRED OR ACTIVE CONTEMPLATION FROM THAT WHICH IS PASSIVE OR INFUSED

202. We have already seen from the examples quoted in our text that those authors who speak of contemplation as acquired and infused, or active and passive, are far from agreeing among themselves as to the meaning they give to these terms.[2] Some, who call "infused" contemplation all that we include under the term "supernatural," when they speak of "active" or "acquired" contemplation refer to affective prayer, in which considerations often give place to petitions and all kinds of protestations of love.[3] Thus St

[1] This appendix originally formed part of the *Degrees of the Spiritual Life,* first and second editions. Wishing to exclude all doctrinal discussion from that work, we have suppressed it and transplanted it here, where it is more in keeping with the subject.

[2] Père Vincente de Peralta, who has made so deep a study of mystical writings, remarks: "Among the numerous authors who, since the seventeenth century, have admitted an acquired contemplation, I have never found two, so to speak, who explained it in the same way" (*Estudios franciscanos*, 1919, p. 289).

[3] When mystical writers show us contemplation as the goal at which the spiritual life ought to aim, is it only affective prayer that they have in view? Those who still hold mystical ways in some suspicion may perhaps believe it, but it is a grave error. The doctors certainly understood by contemplation a kind of prayer greatly superior to that called affective. This latter has been well described by St Teresa (see above, No. 108). Now, it is not this prayer at all which she puts before her daughters as the legitimate object of their aspirations and the fruits of their generosity, but rather mystical prayer. St John of the Cross describes affective prayer in the same way (*Dark Night*, Book I, 1 *et passim*). He represents it as a prayer of transition, which is still meditation,

Alphonsus describes an affective prayer under the name of *Oratio otii contemplativi* (cp. *Degrees*, vol. i, No. 272).

203. We have said that at the commencement of the seventeenth century, a Carmelite writer taught that the contemplative prayer described by St John of the Cross was a contemplation according to the human mode, and the contemplative states of which St Teresa writes were a contemplation above the human mode. Other Carmelite authors of our own day, who rest on the authority of the seventeenth century writers of their own order, justly recognise that the contemplation described by these two Saints is the same in kind, but they apply to it the term "acquired" contemplation, reserving the name "infused" contemplation to extraordinary modes, such as ecstasy, in which the soul sees contemplative graces falling upon her as the gardener sees the rain falling from heaven. "As long as we see the subject employing some activity," they say, "it is acquired contemplation" (*Études Carmelitaines*, April, 1920). These authors are right in not wishing to add a new kind of prayer to those which have been so well described by St Teresa and St John of the Cross. The former, in order to distinguish the different kinds of prayer, took as illustration the various ways of watering a garden, and she admits no intermediate method between that of drawing water from the well by means of a bucket and rope, which represents the prayer of discourse, and the second, in which the water, thanks to the "noria," is obtained more abundantly, though with much less labour. This, according to the Saint, is the supernatural prayer of quiet. They are also correct in thinking that there is no need

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though sweet and ardent, and very distinct from contemplation; and he says, "Meditation ought to issue in contemplation as its proper end" (Max. 276). Père Lallemant and Père Surin call affective prayer by its proper name, and Ven. Père Libermann has devoted a whole treatise to it. They also wish to guide souls to contemplation. "Affective prayer," writes Père Libermann, "is not a permanent state: it is only a road which will lead to contemplation if the soul is faithful."

to insert an intermediate state between the two kinds of prayer spoken of by St John of the Cross (*Ascent*, Book II; *Living Flame*, str. III, v. 3 *et passim*), that is, discursive prayer, meditative or affective, and that contemplative prayer into which the Saint declares it rash to try to enter before recognising in oneself the marks of the presence of contemplative graces. These writers also deserve praise for gainsaying the error of those who admit no intermediary between meditation and extraordinary contemplation, and because they show how important it is to aim at contemplative prayer, so much recommended by St Teresa and St John of the Cross. But to call this contemplative prayer "acquired," to affirm that the soul can "by means of the habit of faith, attain to it by its personal efforts, by its own working," this is a doctrine to which we cannot subscribe. We have given our reasons (Nos. 35 and 51), and we have quoted the decisive words of St John of the Cross and St Teresa, words which we regret to see have been passed over in silence by the author whose teaching we are refuting.

204. Cardinal Brancati de Lauraea, whose doctrine has been recapitulated by Benedict XIV, and who has been followed by a great number of authors, gives a definition[1] of infused contemplation, which includes all supernatural contemplation, but he afterwards attributes to it, in a general manner, properties which belong only to extraordinary contemplation. For example, he likens it to the mystical espousals, he declares that ecstasies are frequent. . . . This is not the quietude of St Teresa and St Francis de Sales, nor the contemplation of St Peter of Alcantara or St John of the Cross.

[1] Some of the characteristics which he assigns to acquired contemplation belong to affective prayer, others to ordinary contemplation. Hence arises, no doubt, the remarkable contradictions which we meet with in this learned author. In one place (*Opusc.* III, ch. xi), he assures us that acquired contemplation does not necessitate any of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Further on (*Opusc.* V, ch. ii), he establishes at length that acquired contemplation does not take place without extraordinary assistance, or without the gifts of understanding and wisdom. Later, in several passages (*Opusc.* VII, ch. iii and iv), he returns to his first assertion.

205. Lastly, there are others who divide what we have called ordinary supernatural contemplation into two distinct kinds, infused and active; others even speak of two kinds of quietude, active and passive.[1] But, then, how are we to distinguish them? The first, say they,[2] is acquired by the working of the soul, already in a state of recollection; the second is a pure gift of God, accorded suddenly sometimes even out of the time of prayer; it is for this that they would reserve the name "supernatural."

It is certain that the various modes of contemplation of which we have spoken—and this is more easily recognised in what we might call "sensible contemplation"—are sometimes given to the soul without labour on its own part, and at the moment when they are least expected. At other times they are only accorded after a certain preparation, and when the soul is in a state of recollection. But this *in no wise affects the nature of the grace*, it is fundamentally the same contemplation, and persons who have experience of these contemplative states make no difference between them.

In our opinion it would be a gross error to state that supernatural contemplation always comes suddenly, and that the preparation, the labour of the soul, does not dispose her more favourably for it. The Saints and doctors love to recall the famous passage from Denis, which points out how the soul should prepare herself to enter into mystical union. They regard a sudden and unexpected manifestation of the divine operation as an exception, on which we must not count. This is also the plain doctrine of St Teresa. If, in several passages, she calls the prayer of quiet, supernatural prayer—that is, as she herself explains, a prayer which the soul, in spite of all her efforts, is incapable of procuring for herself—she recognises, nevertheless (*Relacion* v, p. 31), that we ought "to dispose ourselves for it" in a certain manner, and in her *Life* she expresses herself thus:

[1] Some go further still, and recognise two kinds of prayer of union—active union and that which is passive. See Meynard, *Traité de la Vie intérieure.*

[2] See Scaramelli, *Direct. mistico,* trat. ii, cap. vii, No. 72.

"Having spoken of this laborious manner of watering the garden by drawing water from a well by a bucket and rope"—it is discursive meditation which she illustrates by this example—"I will now speak of a different way of watering introduced by the owner of the garden. This consists in drawing the water by means of a wheel and making it flow through canals, a method which gives much more water with much less effort, and which allows the gardener intervals of repose. I intend to compare this second way of watering to the prayer called that of quiet, of which I am about to speak. Here the soul begins to enter into a state of recollection which is *supernatural, for she cannot acquire it by her own efforts, do what she may*. It is true that she sometimes grows weary *in turning the wheel and filling the conduits*, that is, *in working with the understanding*. But now the water is more on a level with the ground, and the soul has much less labour than in drawing from the bottom of a well" (*Life*, ch. xiv, p. 101).

If supernatural contemplation were essentially an abrupt and violent invasion of grace, St Teresa would certainly not call it the prayer of repose. Still more, she would not have deplored the error of those souls who forsake the mystical way, nor the unskilfulness of directors who draw them aside from it.

Those who are familiar with St John of the Cross will be aware that he is far from presenting supernatural contemplation as a violent and unexpected kind of prayer. Quite the contrary, he shows how it is insinuated into the soul as if insensibly, so that at first it is recognised, not by its impetuosity, but by the repugnance to meditation, the tranquil peace, the restful feeling, which, little by little, take possession of the soul, when the latter is content to keep herself lovingly attentive to God. Of souls very far advanced in contemplative ways, he says that they usually experience the union of love as soon as they *place themselves in the presence of God*. "Often," he says, "God infuses into them this loving knowledge without the medium of acts (of meditation)—at least, *without a great many of them*" (*Ascent*, II, ch. xii, p. 134). Thus we see that mystical contem-

plation is not, in his eyes, an extraordinary prayer, purely passive, and seizing the soul unawares. Besides, his vehement reproaches to directors who retain souls in meditation are incomprehensible if mystical graces are essentially abrupt and imperious.

206. Again let us quote a beautiful page from St Peter of Alcantara, which will further prove that mystical contemplation does not invade the soul on a sudden:

"The last and principal advice we have to give," says the holy writer, "is that we should strive so to join together meditation and contemplation that one becomes a ladder by which we mount to the other. It will be useful to know that the exercise of meditation consists in the attentive and reflective consideration of divine things, and in passing from one to another so that they may produce in our heart affective movements and sentiments. This is something like the way we strike a flint with a steel, in order to produce a spark, but in contemplation the spark must have already been elicited. I mean that we must be under the impression left by these movements and tender feelings, holding ourselves in repose and silence in the enjoyment of them, without using our minds to reason and search out the truth which we contemplate in one simple gaze. . . ."

"We must then say, in accordance with all the masters of the spiritual life, that just as, after attaining our object we cease to use the means thereto, after reaching the port, the labour of navigation is ended, so when he who meditates reaches the state of repose, and the enjoyment of contemplation, he ought to lay aside the pious but laborious researches of meditation, and, content by a simple view and a memory of God, as if he saw him present, to enjoy the realisation of his presence, according to the manner in which it is granted to him, whether it be by love, admiration, joy, or in any way. The reason of this advice is that, as the end of all our working is love and the affections of the will, not the speculations of the understanding, when the will is already captured and possessed by this affection we ought to set aside all reflections and considerations of the mind as far as possible in order to employ all the

powers of our soul in this love, without acts of the other powers intervening to distract it. A certain holy doctor gives the following advice on this subject: As soon as our heart is inflamed with the love of God, we ought immediately to abandon the thoughts and reflections of our mind, however elevated they may be, not because they are bad, but because they are an obstacle to a greater good. That is to say, that movement should cease when we have reached our end; meditation should be discarded for the love of contemplation. We are able to do this, especially towards the end of our exercise, after our petition for the love of God, because we may then suppose that *the labour and meditation which have taken place should have produced some affection and some feeling of love for God.* We must then renounce all the images which present themselves to the imagination, relax our mind, empty the memory and fix it on our Lord, considering that we are in his presence, *yet without considering anything in particular in regard to God,* contenting ourselves with the general knowledge we have of him by faith"—here we have the general and loving knowledge of St John of the Cross—" and resting our heart and our will on him. This is the only means of becoming inflamed with divine love, and in this consists the fruit of meditation. The knowledge of God which can be gained by the understanding is practically nothing, but the will can love him greatly. We must shut ourselves up in the midst of our heart, in that centre of the soul where the image of God is found, and there attend to him, like one who listens to another speaking to him from the top of a high tower, or as if we possessed him in our heart, or, again, as if in all the whole world there were no one but God and ourself. Now, it is not only *at the end of our exercise but also in the course of it, or at any other time,* according to our enablement, that we ought to enter into this spiritual sleep, in which the understanding is put to rest by the will. *When it comes upon us* we ought to make a pause and enjoy *this favour,* then return to our own working when we no longer have this nourishment to digest or taste. What the soul experiences at this time, *the light*

and peaceful satisfaction which she enjoys, cannot be expressed in words. It is indeed the *peace which passes all understanding and all the happiness* which can be enjoyed in this life." The Saint evidently means in these words to describe what St Teresa calls the "*divine tastes*" of quietude.

"*There are some who are so captivated by the love of God that scarcely have they begun to think of him than the remembrance of his sweet name kindles a warmth in their bosom.* Such souls have no more need of discourse and reflection in order to love than a mother or a bride to rejoice in the memory of the son or the spouse when someone speaks of him," etc.

The saintly author does not speak of two distinct kinds of contemplation. That of which he speaks is the one which brings to the soul the delights of divine love, and his description of it corresponds well with the teaching of the other masters. Now, according to him, this contemplation comes upon the soul either at the end of a prolonged meditation, or more rapidly; or even, often enough, especially in more perfect souls, without preamble and at the simple remembrance of God.

Yet, again, St Teresa had taught that even when the soul receives the gift of supernatural recollection, it is not yet time for her to abandon considerations in order to keep herself in repose before God; she must wait, says the Saint, until she is favoured by God with quietude. As some teachers opposed to this the passage from St Peter of Alcantara which we have just quoted, she replied that, on the contrary, she saw in it a confirmation of her doctrine. "Having read the book, we found that the man of God said absolutely the same thing as myself. He expresses himself, it is true, in other words, but it is clear, from what he says, that the soul ought not to arrest the discourse of the understanding until God, raising her to a higher state of prayer, keeps her united to himself by love" (*Fourth Mansion*, ch. iii).

However much it may appear to be "acquired," this contemplation spoken of by St Peter of Alcantara is

nothing else, in the judgement of St Teresa herself, than what that Saint calls the supernatural prayer of quietude.

207. That is why we do not believe it to be the true doctrine to say: Contemplation or infused quietude is that which seizes the soul suddenly, without any labour on her own part, or that the contemplation or acquired quietude is that obtained by the soul through meditation or at least by recollection.

Hence, when there is true quietude, meditation or simple recollection has been able to favour but not produce it; it always remains the gift of God rather than the result of human activity. It is not the same with those feelings of love which are the effect of our own considerations, but these belong to affective prayer. Thus, whether contemplation be sudden and unprepared for, or whether, on the contrary, it visits the soul who has placed herself in the presence of God, these are but purely accidental modes of the same kind of prayer, and we cannot find in them any foundation for establishing a specific difference.

The case of contemplation is the same as that of the secret inspirations of grace, good desires or pious thoughts. Whether they surprise the soul while she is occupied with cares of an entirely different nature, or whether they arrive at a moment when she is intent on recollection and prayer, does not change either their character or their nature.[1]

[1] We used to believe that this opinion of Scaramelli was no longer held by anyone, but has it not reappeared in the work of a learned contemporary author, Abbé Pourrat? "In mysticism," he says (*Spirit. chrét.*, p. vi), "it is God who invades the soul suddenly and impetuously, without any other activity on her part than that comprised in receiving and enjoying the divine gift" (see, again, p. 207). Immediately after this definition, M. Pourrat, evidently having in view ourselves and the many others who think as we do, declares that he does not admit the doctrine of those who "teach that every faithful soul who seriously strives after perfection is called to mystical union." But those whose doctrine is rejected by M. Pourrat *in no wise understand mystical union in the same sense as he does.* If our conception of it were as restricted as his, not one of us would say that it is the normal issue of the spiritual life. We are still further confirmed in our idea that the conceptions of this author are very different from ours when we see M. Pourrat (p. 47) give as the characteristic mark of mystical union the senti-

208. Would it be better to say with certain writers that active contemplation is that in which the soul retains her liberty and her merit, and passive contemplation is that which takes away the power of producing acts which are free and meritorious?

This, again, seems to us to contradict the teaching of the masters. Theologians and mystical authors very generally agree in saying that the acts elicited in contemplation are very disinterested, very free from the impurities of nature, and therefore very meritorious. Suarez, treating the question *ex professo*, teaches without hesitation that even in ecstasy the soul remains free, and he gives arguments which appear irrefutable (cp. St Thomas, I-II, Q. 24, a. ii, c.).

There is always this difference between contemplation, even "extraordinary," and beatific vision, that in the latter the sight of the *absolute* good compels the soul's love and takes away the possibility of meriting.[1]

And even if we were to admit that in the higher degrees of contemplative prayer, in ecstasy, rapture, etc., the soul, which is then no longer free to conceal herself from these divine operations, once she is ravished, is equally deterred from exercising the interior acts of faith and charity at will, and that she consents under compulsion (*fatalement*) to the solicitations of divine grace; in the case of such contemplation as is described by St Peter of Alcantara, St John of the Cross, Père Balthazar Alvarez, at least in its ordinary degrees, these arguments could not reasonably be sustained.

209. The inability to meditate and produce discursive acts is also brought forward as a mark of passive or infused contemplation, in opposition to that which is active or acquired.

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ment of the presence of God, and say that during the periods of desolation experienced by contemplatives the mystical state no longer exists. Lastly, he recommends to his reader some pages in which Père Poulain puts forward a theory against which we protest with all our power.

[1] This is also, it is fair to say, the general teaching. The Fathers St Thomas, Benedict XIV, etc., agree on this point. See Père Meynard, *Traité de la Vie Intérieure*, Vol. II, No. 239; Suarez, *De dev. et orat. ment.*, ch. xix and ch. xx, No. 8.

This inability to meditate usually exists in ordinary contemplation, but in very varying degrees. "As soon as the (contemplative) soul places herself in the presence of God, she begins the exercise of a confused, loving, peaceful and tranquil knowledge, and she drinks in wisdom, love and delight. For this reason the soul experiences great suffering and bitterness when, being in this state of repose, she is bidden to meditate and to return to the labour of particular acts. She is like a little infant, taken away from the maternal breast, from which it has been used to draw abundance of milk, and who is now obliged to seek with painful effort after its accustomed nourishment. In the same way, he who has removed the rind of a fruit that he might enjoy its substance, is annoyed if the fruit which is already in his hands is taken away from him, and he is obliged to return to the rind" (*Ascent*, II, xii, p. 154).

"There are some souls," says St Teresa—and they are many who have made me this disclosure—"who, having been raised by our Lord to perfect contemplation, desire always to remain in that state, but it is impossible. In truth, after enjoying this divine favour, they cannot meditate as before. . . .

"Here, I think, we find the cause. As meditation only tends towards finding God, once he has been reached, and we have accustomed ourselves to seeking him by the operation of the will (by acts of love), we no longer wish to weary ourselves by labouring with the understanding. It seems to me also that the will, that generous power, when it feels itself inflamed, on fire with love, does not care to make further use of the understanding. . . .

"The soul which has been raised to supernatural prayer and to perfect contemplation understands more perfectly the life and passion of our Lord; the understanding conceives them so clearly, they are so deeply engraved on the memory, that a simple gaze at our Lord prostrate in the Garden of Olives, covered by that terrible sweat of blood, suffices that soul, I do not say for an hour, but for several days. *In one single glance* she sees who it is that is reduced to this state, and how un-

grateful we are to think so little of his sufferings. Immediately, the will, *without sensible tenderness,* conceives ardent desires of showing in some way her gratitude for so great a benefit, of suffering a little for him who has suffered so much for us. Other sentiments of the same nature are born in the soul and occupy her memory and understanding. This, it seems to me, is the reason why such a soul cannot stay to make discursive acts on the Passion" (*Sixth Mansion,* ch. vii, pp. 148, 151).

This inability to meditate is then already experienced even when quietude is still very weak—at the beginning of the comtemplative life. It is even felt, as St. Teresa testifies, out of the time of prayer, and before quietude has taken possession of the soul. With much more reason, when quietude is more intense, this inability to meditate will be augmented; when the soul is inundated with the delights of contemplation, which are sometimes so vivid, this impotence will be insurmountable.

Let us add that the gifts of the Holy Spirit, which do not depend on our human activity, may fix the mind on some truth, from which it will with difficulty turn itself away. For instance, a soul, vividly struck by the presence of our Lord in her heart or on the altar, will feel not only repugnance, but a kind of palpable obstacle hindering her from considering any other mystery of the faith.

This inability, which we must take care not to exaggerate, is the natural effect of all contemplative activity.

210. Bossuel, in his first work on these delicate questions, made it the essential and characteristic note of the passive state. Besides, he gives an excessive and false idea of it, for he attributes it to a special action of God binding the powers of the soul to prevent them from acting, and he assures us that the faculties being thus fettered by God himself, the power of making discursive acts "*is altogether wanting.*" This miraculous action may be found in extraordinary contemplation, *e.g.*, in rapture; it does not exist in ordinary contemplation or quietude. But Bossuet did not make this distinction,

and by a confusion which rather lessens the value of his beautiful treatise on the states of prayer, he includes ecstasies and raptures under the same title of passive prayer with the supernatural contemplation of quietude of St Teresa and the prayer of the simple presence of God and simple waiting upon God of St Francis de Sales.

We believe that this inexact idea of supernatural contemplation is the reason why in the same work (Book IX) he makes the surprising assertion that St Francis de Sales was only acquainted with the prayer of quietude at second hand;[1] and this other not less strange affirmation, which was so sharply contradicted by Fénélon, that "in the great saints of antiquity we do not find the smallest indication (*ni trait ni virgule*) of a tendence towards the passive state" (*ibid.*, Book VII).

Always preoccupied with this extraordinary character which he wished to see in quietude, Bossuet (*ibid.*, Book IX) applied to it this passage of St Teresa: "As to the degree of merit, that does not depend at all on these kinds of graces, since there are many holy persons who have never received them, while there are others,

[1] The reasons he gives for this assertion are strange. He takes them from a letter of March 11, 1610. In this letter the holy Bishop advised Mme. de Chantal, who was still in the world, to learn as much as she could of the rules of prayer from a good Prioress of Carmel whom he had instructed on this subject. Thus, concludes Bossuet, he had no personal experience of quietude, since he advised her to "consult on this subject a holy religious"! St Francis de Sales added that he did not judge it advisable to establish a rule that all preparation for prayer should be omitted. "Although two or three times," he adds, "during the past summer, placing myself in the presence of God *without preparation* or design, I experienced *extreme satisfaction . . .* with *one single, very simple and continual affection of an almost imperceptible, but very sweet love . . .* yet I would not dare to go aside from the high road to make that my usual proceeding." From this passage, in which quietude is so well described, Bossuet concludes that the holy Bishop was still in the way of methodical meditation! He gives another reason, equally astounding, which we have already refuted (No. 142). The truth is that St Francis de Sales was very early raised to the mystical state. While studying at Paris, when he was about twenty years old, he every day spent a long time in prayer, and would have liked to pass whole days at the foot of the altar, having a great repugnance to all secular business. The resolutions he made while studying theology at Padua show that he considered prayer as a time of quietude.

who are not holy, who have done so" (*Sixth Mansion*, ch. ix). In the opinion of the illustrious Bishop, therefore, quietude was one of those graces *gratis datae* which only concur indirectly in the sanctification of souls.[1] Now these words of St Teresa, on which he rests his opinion, have no reference to quietude, but to the apparitions of our Lord.

On this point Fénélon very justly replied to Bossuet: If supernatural prayer thus entailed the suspension of the powers; if, in this kind of prayer, the soul were completely passive, it would be impossible to resist it. But then why should St John of the Cross recommend us so often and so insistently not to make efforts to discourse? Why does he assure us that there are many directors who by obliging souls to meditate, and thus withdrawing them from the quietude in which God had placed them, do them great harm? Fénélon might have added: Why does St Teresa make the same recommendations, and why does she affirm that many souls lose the prayer of quiet by a too great recourse to vocal prayer?

But it is only fair to remark that in his later writings, and especially in his letters and pious opuscules, the illustrious Bishop of Meaux speaks of contemplation, of the prayer of the simple presence of God, in the same terms as St John of the Cross and St Teresa.

211. Without exaggerating, as Bossuet has done, this inability to meditate which contemplative graces ordinarily produce, let us quote a contemporary author, Dom Vital Lehodey, who, being an experienced mystic, has treated of these questions as one competent to judge. In his book *Les Voies de l'oraison mentale*, Dom Lehodey points out this fact, that certain souls who are well content with a very simple prayer devoid of considerations, yet have no repugnance to meditation, and

[1] The mystical state, he had previously said (Book VII), is not like prophecy or the gift of tongues or miracles; it resembles the kind of grace called gratuitous, *gratia gratis data*. . . . If we must pursue the subject still further, let us say that the mystical state, consisting principally in something that God works in us without our co-operation, and in which, in consequence, there neither is nor can be merit, etc. !

he concludes from this that they are in a state of acquired contemplation. This acquired contemplation, he says, "is the second phase of affective prayer"[1] (p. 200). He adds: "Has God begun to pour secretly into this soul his light and warmth? *It is difficult to believe that without it anyone could persevere in a form of prayer so little adapted to captivate the mind.* But this mystical element, if it exists, is so deeply hidden that it is imperceptible" (p. 206). What makes the venerable author conclude that the mystical element is absent is that the difficulty in meditating is so slight. If it were more accentuated, he would not hesitate to recognise the mystical state.

Another writer, who is a very safe guide, and who spoke from experience when treating of mystical questions, Père Lamballe († 1914) in his book *Contemplation* (p. 98), while recognising the great merit of Dom Lehodey's manual, reproaches him for having admitted this acquired contemplation. "It seems," he says, "as if he referred sometimes to contemplation, sometimes to affective prayer." It may happen at times that affective prayer is thus simplified, but, as we have said (No. 110), we scarcely believe it possible that a soul could persevere long in a state of prayer so simple, without having received the mystical gifts of faith and infused love.

But still, although it is very true that the action of the Holy Spirit enlightening the soul and infusing love into it usually makes the labour of meditation difficult and painful, as indeed is often the case with vocal prayer also, nevertheless it sometimes happens that this repugnance to meditation and recited prayers[2] does not always

[1] This idea, it is important to remark, is very different from that held by other partisans of acquired contemplation. "Many authors," rightly remarks Dom Vital Lehodey (Preface, p. 11), "have created a disconcerting confusion by their parallel descriptions of acquired and infused contemplation." Two authors who adopt the opinion of Dom Lehodey (see the review *La vie spirituelle*, 1919, p. 159, and January, 1921, p. 307) give this prayer of acquired contemplation as a transitory state, very quickly succeeded by mystical contemplation, and this seems also to be the opinion of Dom Lehodey.

[2] Let us remark, however, that vocal prayers are much more compatible with contemplation than the considerations of discursive prayer.

exist where mystical elements are certainly present. We have met with such cases, we have heard others bear witness to them. Thus we do not believe that prayer must always be judged non-mystical if this repugnance to meditation is not present; although it is ordinarily a characteristic of mystical contemplation, yet we do not believe it to be absolutely essential.

In any case it is certain that the great doctors make no mention of non-mystical contemplation. If certain souls arrive by their own efforts at simplifying their prayer and contenting themselves with one or two ideas; if others, after carefully reflecting on some truth, remain as if naturally absorbed in its tranquil consideration, without having received mystical graces, still, these are exceptional cases for which we can formulate no rule.

212. Other distinctive marks of infused contemplation, given by those partisans of a classification which we oppose, are not more admissible. One of these marks is a *clearness and distinctness* in the knowledge communicated to the contemplative soul. In order to see how little foundation there is for this claim to a specific difference, the reader has only to recall the passages in which St John of the Cross speaks of the *confused, indistinct* knowledge of God, which he gives as the basis of supernatural contemplation.

Again, it is said that in infused contemplation the soul is so completely absorbed by the sight of divine truths that the ramblings of the imagination are impossible. Numerous passages from St Teresa might be brought forward to refute this opinion. Let us confine ourselves to the one in which the Saint shows how the will may taste the ineffable delights of union with God, while the understanding and imagination are given up to painful distractions.

213. Lastly, in our own day, those who admit the entirely novel theory according to which the mystical state is brought about by a direct perception of the Divine Being, call acquired contemplation or prayer of simplicity, certain states in which they do not find indications of that element declared by them to be essential

and characteristic.[1] This distinction falls to the ground of itself when we realise that it is a grave error to attribute to the mystical state this immediate perception of God.

In many cases the discernment of mystical prayer is rendered impossible by this novel opinion. Those who admit it certainly do not recognise the mystical state in many cases where it does exist. They ask of those whom they see attracted to the prayer of simple regard: "Are you conscious of anything extraordinary in your soul? Do you feel the presence of God within you?" and from the affirmative or negative response they draw their conclusions as to the presence or absence of the mystical state.

To such a question, those who experience sensible consolation would reply in the affirmative; those, on the contrary, who only feel calm and satisfaction in the will, still more those who are in a mystical state of aridity and sadness, would infallibly give a negative answer. From this would necessarily arise the fatal error of taking for essential what is altogether secondary and accessory; that is, the delightful emotions which contemplation produces in the sensitive appetite.

214. After this, to what impossible conclusions might we not come? We might say, for example, that the state described by St Jane de Chantal (see Nos. 6 and 95), a state in which the soul, as she says, receives such abundance of light and so pure a love, is not a mystical state; that the Saint, in 1621, after she had long been favoured with ecstasies, was still only in an intermediate state, prelude of the mystical state. Indeed, it is the prayer of St Jane de Chantal which is especially given as an example of non-mystical contemplation by the author

[1] These authors—and with them most of the present-day partisans of acquired contemplation—are correct in recognising that the contemplative states spoken of by St John of the Cross and St Teresa are infused prayer. Therefore they intercalate their acquired contemplation between the first and second waters of St Teresa (*Life*, ch. xi *et seq.*); between the prayer of discourse and the contemplative prayer which, according to St John of the Cross, St Francis de Sales and all the great mystics, immediately succeeds it.

who has introduced the aforesaid theory (*Grâc. d'or*, ii, 72).

We know that St Teresa states that "our Lord grants his graces so generously to the religious of her monasteries that . . . almost all . . . reach perfect contemplation." St Jane de Chantal, on her part, wrote tc a Superior of her Order: "The *almost universal* attraction of the daughters of the Visitation is to a very simple presence of God . . . and I could well omit '*almost*,' for I have recognised that *all* those who from the beginning have applied themselves to prayer as they should, and who mortify and exercise themselves in virtue as they ought, reach that state. . . . Lastly, I maintain that this kind of prayer is essential to our little congregation; *it is a great gift from God for which we owe him infinite thanks*."

The two great foundresses make the same consoling declaration, and both see in it a great grace from God. Now, the same author who declares St Teresa to have been in the mystical state and gives St Jane de Chantal as an example of non-mystical contemplation, makes the same distinction between the first Carmelites and the first nuns of the Visitation. According to him, then, God called the Carmelites to mystical prayer, and the nuns of the Visitation to a non-mystical contemplation![1]

[1] It is a strange thing, that in the very passage where he maintains this bizarre theory (*Grâc. d'or*, II, 39), Père Poulain quotes the words of St Jane de Chantal which we have just recalled: "Which is a great gift from God, for which we owe him infinite thanks," words which suffice to show how great is his error. He quotes these other words of the same Saint: "I tell you simply and with confidence that about twenty years ago God took from me all power of praying with my understanding and consideration or meditation. All I can do is to suffer and to arrest the activity of my mind in God, adhering to his operation by an entire submission, without making acts unless moved thereto by his influence, awaiting thus what it should please his goodness to bestow on me." And this is Père Poulain's typical case of acquired contemplation! There are many other words of St Jane de Chantal which might be quoted, which all prove without possibility of doubt that her prayer was mystical in character. See in our *Vie de la Mère Clement*. Appendix I, *the prayer of the Visitation*, where it is shown how and why the visible favours, such as raptures and ecstasies, at first

How much more true it is to see the same phenomenon in each case, the same law, observed by Bossuet himself, and before him so well explained by St John of the Cross; a law in virtue of which souls fully faithful to grace are drawn out of inferior degrees of prayer, to be raised to one more simple yet more precious, and passing from the meditative and ascetical state to that which is contemplative and mystical.

215. Although we do not hold that the classification introduced in the last few centuries between mystical and acquired contemplation ought to be admitted, we consider, on the contrary, the division of mystical contemplation into ordinary and extraordinary to be well founded.

St Francis de Sales (*Love of God*, vii, 4) qualifies as extraordinary the contemplation which produces ecstasies; therefore—and this is borne out by all the rest of his treatise—every other mode of contemplation is regarded by him as ordinary.

Père Lallemant says: "Two sorts of contemplation may be distinguished, one ordinary, the other extraordinary. Ordinary contemplation is a supernatural habit by which God raises the powers of the soul to sublime knowledge and light, to high sentiments and spiritual 'tastes,' when he no longer finds in the soul sins, passions, affections, solicitudes which hinder the communications he desires to make. . . . There is another kind of contemplation which is more elevated, in which take place raptures, ecstasies, visions, and other extraordinary effects" (*Spiritual Doctrine*, seventh princ., ch. iv).

Père Grou, after describing contemplative prayer according to St Teresa and St Francis de Sales, adds: "I only speak here of the ordinary passive way, otherwise called the way of bare faith. The *extraordinary*, which is very rare, is that in which are found raptures, ecstasies, revelations, visions and other similar favours" (*Maxim. spir.*, ninth max.).

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so frequent, became afterwards less numerous in the Visitation than in Carmel, without the mystical graces being less abundant or less precious.

Let not then mystical contemplation be qualified as extraordinary prayer, as has been too often done during the last centuries. St John of the Cross says (*Max.* 276, vol. iii, p. 47) that "prayer leads to contemplation as to its proper end." St Francis de Sales (*Love of God*, vi, 6) says that contemplation is "the end and the goal to which all the other exercises tend." All the masters are in agreement on this point. That which is the normal issue of the spiritual life cannot be taxed with being extraordinary. Those who cling to this mode of speech expose themselves to the danger either of persuading contemplatives that they are favoured with sublime and quasi-miraculous graces, or else of keeping from contemplation, as from a way too high for them, souls whom God is calling to it.

APPENDIX II

DOES CONTEMPLATION NECESSITATE A SPECIAL AND VERY RARE VOCATION?

216. We think it will be useful to make a few remarks with regard to the teaching of Père de Maumigny († 1918), whose book, *Pratique de l'oraison mentale*, has been widely read. The reverend father, adhering firmly to the doctrine which prevailed during the eighteenth century, held contemplation to be an extraordinary kind of prayer, in no way necessary to perfection, and *demanding a special vocation, not granted to the majority of those who practise mental prayer!* He exhorts those who are not favoured with this special vocation "not to lose courage, but to persevere generously in the common way"—in which they will never get beyond meditation—"believing that this path will lead them to sanctity."

Does the holy author wish us to understand that we may attain to sanctity, which he very rightly defines as "the transformation of our will into the divine will," by means only of the activity, the labour of the soul herself, with no assistance beyond the lights acquired by the help of the considerations of meditation, by the exercise of those virtues only which are inculcated by processes of reasoning, to the exclusion of those superior lights which come from the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the assistance procured by these same gifts, enkindling the soul with love and penetrating her with a strength at once mysterious and divine? He does not seem to have cleared up this point, nor to have grasped that herein lies the importance of the whole question.

The perusal of his book shows that he had not studied deeply mystical authors; the few quotations he brings forward in no wise prove his theses, and he seems to ignore the innumerable passages which tell against them.

His convictions are so strong that he sees a confirmation of his theory in the very texts which are its condemnation. Thus, to prove that we ought not to desire contemplation, he brings forward these words of St Teresa: "I do not doubt, my daughters, that you are longing to find yourselves in this state, and *you are quite right.*" He had also read this passage from the same Saint: "There would seem, at first sight, to be some contradiction between what I have just said in the last chapter—that our Lord invites us all to his banquet—and what I had said before, when, to console those souls who do not attain to contemplation, I declared that there are many paths by which we may go to God, just as there are many mansions in Heaven. I still abide by a truth so consoling, and it is sweet to me to repeat that our Lord, having so intimate a knowledge of our weakness, and taking counsel with his infinite goodness, has found means of helping us proportioned to our needs. *Yet our Lord has not said, Let some come by way of contemplation, and the rest by other paths; on the contrary, so great is his mercy that he will not hinder any from coming to drink at this fountain of life*" (*Way of Perfection*, ch. xx). This passage, in which St Teresa confirms so clearly what she had just said concerning the general call to contemplation, Père de Maumigny, in his first three editions, quotes as a retractation of the Saint, as a proof of his own thesis, that the number of those called to contemplation is but few; but in quoting it he mutilates it, omitting the whole of the last phrase!

In his subsequent editions he contents himself with saying that St Teresa contradicts herself, and he continues to oppose the *Interior Castle* to the Saint's other works. Thus, it is in his eyes a fundamental error to regard the contemplative state as the normal goal of a spiritual life faithfully adhered to; yet he confesses that this was St Teresa's opinion up to the time when she wrote the *Interior Castle*. He would then teach that this great Saint, whose authority in spiritual matters is nevertheless so great, remained during almost the whole of her life under the influence of a very grave error. The Spanish Jesuits, justly shocked at this accusation, have

proved by solid arguments in their Review *Razon y Fe* (1908) that Père de Maumigny had understood the Saint wrongly. They demonstrate that St Teresa, as well in the *Interior Castle* as in her other works, had always taught that contemplative graces are the ordinary means by which God leads souls to perfection, and that if we do not receive them, it is not for want of that very special vocation imagined by certain writers, but because we lack detachment and humility. Other Spanish reviews, for example the *Ciencia tomista* of the Dominicans, and the *Estudios Franciscanos* of the Capuchins, have echoed this teaching and upheld its truth.

At the present date we think it unnecessary to refute point by point this author, to whose piety all render homage, but whose authority is small in matters which he had not sufficiently studied.

In Père de Maumigny we see a striking example of the immense influence exercised by our early training; so difficult is it for us to change ideas which have been impressed on our minds in our youth, and which for many years we have held as incontestable truths.

INDEX

(The numbers refer to *paragraphs* throughout.)

ACQUIRED and infused prayer, 35, 126, 204
Affective prayer, 202
Albert the Great, Blessed, commentary on Denis, 17; unitive state, 50 note; seven gifts, 66; spiritual senses, 91 note; contemplation of pagans, 131
Alphonsus, St, affective prayer, 202
Alvarado, acquired contemplation, 135, 140
Alvarez, Blessed, sentiment of the presence of God, 106
Aridity, 84, 114
Arintero, limitation of mystical state, 70 note
Augustine, St, degrees of spiritual life, 22; passions, 180

Basil, St, goal of religious life, 21
Benedict XIV, acquired contemplation, 139; infused prayer, 202
Bernadette, had no ecstasies, 110
Bernard, St, kiss of spouse, 21; divine contact, 91 note; sentiment of the presence of God, 100; mystical peace, 157
Bona, the three ways, 153
Bonaventure, St, doctrine of, 30 *et seq.;* sentiment of the presence of God, 101
Bossuet, ligature of powers, 75, 156; prayer of simplicity, 144; inability to reason, 156, 162, 210; passage to contemplation, 214
Boudon, inaccurate terms, 141
Bouix, translation of St Teresa, 34 note and 36 note
Boulesteix, difference between ascetic and mystical states, 181
Brancati de Lauraea, infused prayer, 204

Calatayud, acquired contemplation, 139
Cassian, contemplation sometimes granted to imperfect souls, 157
Chantal, St Jane de, describes mystical state, 6; prayer of quiet, 72, 116; aridity, 115; distractions, 171
Clement of Alexandria, doctrine of, 18
Clorivière, Père de, spiritual marriage, 111 note; inaccurate terms, 143; passive prayer, 123
Contemplation of pagans, 131
Contemplation of savants, 132
Crasset, unitive way, 154

Degrees of union, 151
Denis the Carthusian, unitive way, 152
Denis the Mystic, doctrine of, 10 *et seq.;* quoted by St Thomas 27 and 71, by St Bonaventure 32; transport of love, 172
Desolations, 77 and 166
Difference between ascetical and mystical states, 181
Distractions, 162, 171
Divine contact, 76, 89, 95
Divisions of prayer, 126, 215
Duplication of mystical contemplation, 156, 205

Ecstasies, not to be desired, 110, 158

Effects of mystical prayer, 72
Excursus, 81
Experimental perception of the presence of God, 215
Extraordinary, use of word, 61, 178
Ezquerra, Lopes, acquired contemplation, 139

Fénélon, reply to Bossuet, 210
Francis de Sales, St, Prayer of union, 39; kiss of spouse, 71; mystical recollection, 80; doctrine of, 92; goal of spiritual life, 126; divisions of prayer, 127, 215; distractions, 162; desolations, 166; prayer of quiet, 210

Gertrude, St, passive prayer, 188
Gifts of the Holy Spirit, 26, 64
Graces "gratis datae," 29, 62 note
Gregory the Great, St, doctrine of, 23; desolations, 77; degrees of prayer, 167
Gregory of Nyssa, doctrine of, 21
Grou, Père, sentiment of the presence of God, 104; extraordinary prayer, 215

Hesychius, doctrine of, 20
Hilton, W., contemplation of pagans, 132
Honorius of St Mary, divine contact, 91 note, 128; binding of powers, 157

Isidore, St, doctrine of, 28

John of Jesus and Mary, doctrine of, 133; natural contemplation, 117 note; unitive way, 158
John of the Cross, St, doctrine of, ch. vi, clearness of doctrine, 49; definition of contemplation, 50; night of sense, 50, 93; obscure knowledge, 51; mystical theology, 53; theological virtues, 56; union of transport, 59; mystical union not extraordinary, 61, 205; extraordinary favours, 62; effects of mystical prayer, 72; consolations not essential, 77; sentiment of presence of God, 84; aridity, 85, 114; divine contact, 108; ecstasies, 110; full mystical state, 120; passage to contemplation, 129, 214; only one kind of contemplation, 135; degrees of union, 151; inability to meditate, 209
Joseph of St Mary, introduces new doctrine, 134
Justinian, Laurence, signs of contemplation, 72

Lallemant, phases of mystical state, 110; sentiment of the presence of God, 177; affective prayer, 202; divisions of prayer, 215
Lamballe, acquired contemplation, 211
Lehodey, Dom, acquired contemplation, 211
Libermann, sentiment of the presence of God, 173; affective prayer, 202; ligature of powers, 75, 209

Macarius, St, doctrine of, 20
Margaret Mary, St, describes mystical state, 2; complete mystical state, 119; mystical trials, 163; sentiment of the presence of God, 168
Mary of St Euphrasia Pelletier, describes mystical state, 5
Mary of the Incarnation, Ven., describes mystical state, 3; mystical lights, 83; varying states, 86; three phases of mystical state, 122; mystical lights, 188; desolations, 167
Maumigny, Père, teaching refuted, 216
Maximus, St, doctrine of, 21

Michel de la Fuente, mystical prayer, 140
Mystical state described, 2 *et seq.;* leads to humility, 48 note; not extraordinary, 61; essential elements of, 62 *et seq.,* 73; ought to be desired, 62; consolations not essential to, 77; intensity cannot be measured, 88; fully developed, 118; necessary to perfection, 148; entry into, 159; incompatible with hysteria, 176
Mystical graces, co-operation with, 170; influence on our life, 198

Non-mystical contemplation, 106, 114
Nouet, spiritual senses, 91 note

Olier, passive state, 188

Passions, 100
Pauper, M., desolations, 166
Peter of Alcantara, St, prayer of quiet, 205
Phases of mystical state, 110, 122
Philip of the Blessed Trinity, acquired contemplation, 138
Poulain, prayer of union, 36 note; acquired contemplation, 135 note, 214; unitive way, 149 note; divisions of prayer, 151 note, 214 note; "additional acts," 170 note; difference between ascetical and mystical states, 181 note
Pourrat, active and infused prayer, 208
Prayer of simplicity, 144
Presence of God, realisation of, ch. x
Purity of soul, 28

Ribet, divine contact, 76
Richard of St Victor, divine contact, 102 note; presence of God, 105; acquired contemplation, 130 note
Rodriguez (Alph.), full mystical state, 121; three phases of mystical life, 128; error of, 128

Savonarola, error of, 199
Scaramelli, divine contact, 91; acquired and infused contemplation, 208; sensible delights, 116, 168; sentiment of the presence of God, 78, 88 *et seq.;* spiritual marriage, 112
Suarez, doctrine of, ch. viii; sensible sweetness, 116; unitive way, 152; mystical lights, 182
Surin, sentiment of the presence of God, 103, 188; error of, 199; affective prayer, 202

Teresa, St, doctrine of, ch. v; acquired and infused prayer, 35; ecstatic prayer, 36; effects of mystical union, 72; mystical lights, 82; ecstasies, 89; sentiment of the presence of God, 93 *et seq.;* acquired contemplation, 128; mystical love, 191; mystical trials, 193 *et seq.;* prayer of quiet, 205, 214; inability to meditate, 209; affective prayer, 202; distractions, 212
Thomas, St, doctrine of, 25; presence of God, 60 note; three modes of union, 71; sentiment of the presence of God, 102; operation of the Holy Ghost, 181, 187 note; co-operation of inferior powers, 201

Union, three modes of, 71
Unitive way, ch. xii, 146

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Dr. Pourrat's materials are taken from the words and acts of our Lord and his Evangelists and Apostles, from early Fathers and Doctors, from Saints and Martyrs, from Founders and their Rules, and by means of frequent quotations he tries to stimulate his readers to seek the originals.

He believes that the vigorous words and inspiring methods and strenuous practices of the early heroes of the Church are better fitted to train souls to endure hardness and advance in renunciation and self-sacrifice towards contemplation than the more comfortable and delectable, if not dilettante, ways of some recent spirituality.

IN the second volume of his work Dr. Pourrat deals with the great ascetic and mystical writers of the Middle Ages—from S Bernard, through the German Benedictine Mystics, the Victorines, the Scholastics, the early Franciscans and Dominicans, the author of the "Imitation" and his school, to the epoch of the Renaissance.

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